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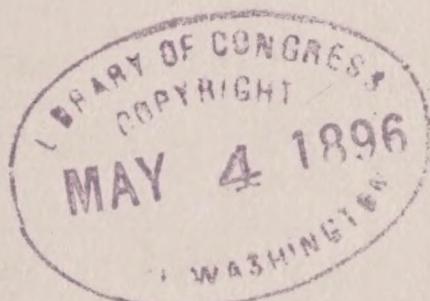
NO PLACE FOR REPENTANCE

BY

ELLEN F. PINSENT

"
Author of

"*Jenny's Case*" and "*Children of this World*



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NO PLACE FOR REPENTANCE.

CHAPTER I.

ABOUT a mile and a half of level road, glistening with white chalk, leads from Cowsthorpe Station to the town. Perhaps nowhere else in England would the one street with its few houses be dignified with that name, for indeed it is but a village. But as all things are comparative, in the marshes of Lincolnshire Cowsthorpe is a place of some importance. Yet no spirit of business stirs its inhabitants, who are agriculturists turned shopkeepers and apparently expect the sun now as before to do the greater part of their work for them. The goods are piled carelessly in the windows of the shops — there are but four or five — and the fine chalk-dust accumulates over everything, and is never wiped away. A pile of faded prints stands outside

the linen draper's door, and a ready-made suit of corduroys hangs swaying in the breeze. In one or two doorways the owners may probably be seen staring stolidly before them, at long intervals making short remarks to one another. Sleepiness prevails and is infectious; some half-dozen vehicles may pass during the day, the doctor's dog-cart, the old Vicar in his pony carriage, or now and then a farm-wagon. But apparently there is nothing to disturb, nothing to interest the inhabitants. They slouch about the one street all day long, or sit nodding their heads in their back parlors, while over all this stillness the great silent church looks down on them from its nest among the elm trees. Within its walls nothing wakes the echoes during the week but the striking of the deep-toned clock which scores each hour of idleness to the indifferent town below. Only the rooks are full of business, and the life in the elm trees forms a marked contrast to that of the dull little street.

Once only during the time that I

knew Cowsthorpe did an event occur which interfered for a few months with the prevailing quiet. More than one of its inhabitants were stirred to unexpected depths. The excitement passed, and on the surface all is as before. But nothing takes place without leaving some effect, and there are two or three people whose lives will always be both worse and better for its happening. Striking, as it did, a note of the great tragedy of human life, it may be that it is worth recording.

The first intimation of any change came in this way. It was Sunday; the congregation had just dispersed, and several groups were standing about the churchyard ready for gossip. This is as much part of the ritual of the morning service as saying the Creed and the Ten Commandments. It is the moment when affairs of great importance are discussed, the price of corn, the health of pigs, and the chances of the weather. But on that day these topics, important though they are to most of the con-

gregation, were thrown into the background by a startling and wholly unexpected piece of news that had been announced in church by the old Vicar

He had told them that owing to failing health and advancing years he had decided that he must have a curate to help him, and had prayed to God to guide him in his choice. Could anything have been more disconcerting for Cowsthorpe, for had not all its folk been baptized, married and buried by old Mr. Nugent for the last thirty years? Had he not, with a few rare exceptions, preached to them each Sunday during that time? Every one knew what was to be expected from him both in doctrine and charity, but are we not all suspicious of the unknown?

Bell was the centre of a group which stood about the churchyard gate, and more than one pair of eyes glanced at him inquiringly. He spoke but little, and perhaps in consequence his speech was regarded as oracular. He was foreman on the

largest farm in the parish and his master, Mr. Foster, had been known more than once to defer to him in agricultural matters. Hence he was alternately despised and respected by the rest of the farm hands, but whichever attitude of mind was paramount for the moment his opinion was always asked on questions of importance. To-day he seemed disinclined to pronounce judgment. The subject was new to him and his mind worked slowly, so taking advantage of his great height he looked over the questioning faces towards the porch of the church. It was his wife who broke the silence—

“So that’s why Mäister Nugent was wantin’ to ha’ a look round wer parlour an’ traapsin’ up i’ the chaamber for. He looked a bit slaape an’ says, ‘Mrs. Bell,’ he says, ‘could yer manage a lodger?’ he says. ‘I doubt not,’ I says, for I didn’t rightly know what he was drivin’ at, an’ I’ve plenty o’ work wi’out havin’ to cleän up a’ter no greät howerboys, an’ I reckoned it might be one o’ them theer tiresome

tykes at the malt-kiln as he were thinkin' about. 'Naay,' he says, 'but a nice quiet gentleman as 'ull paay reg'-lar.' 'A bit o' reg'lar mooney coomin' in is worth a deal,' I says, and then he gits up an' 'Good-daay to yer, Mrs. Bell,' he says, 'I'll let yer know.'"

This seemed to bring the matter home to more than one of them; the advantage or disadvantage of a lodger was something tangible. Bell looked round and spoke, though doubtfully.

"Dunno as I want a parson allus in and out. I can't see what we want wi' anoother. Mäister Nugent we're ewst to, he knows us an' we know him, an' he ain't allus botherin' in an' out o' folk's houses, peerin' to see what we've got cookin' i' the pot. He cooms when he's wanted and bides at home till he's asked. Them theer young curaates doesn't know their plaace. I heäred tell o' one on 'em ower at Gainsby as worried the folks till they threätened to duck him i' the hurse pond, he got 'em so mad wi' his interferin'."

"I reckon he'll be a'ter you, Bell,"

laughed one of the men, “mebbe he’ll belong to the Blew Ribbon Army.”

“Now doän’t yer goä vexin’ my maan wi’ any o’ your nonsense, Jim Tear,” said Mrs. Bell, “your wife ’ud be a deäl mower coomfortable if yer kep’ clear o’ the pūlic, so theer.”

“Maayblins Mäister Nugent wants him to lig along o’ yow, so as he maay keep his eye o’ Bell,” retorted Jim. “Miss Hildred was a-saayin’ to my ode laady as Mäister Nugent says to her, ‘Miss Hildred,’ he says, ‘Sheepbank is my greätest trial,’ he says, ‘it’s all drink an’ dissent.’”

“That’s jūst a bit o’ Miss Hildred’s babblement,” said Mrs. Bell scornfully, “whoiver heärd Mäister Nugent talk o’ that how, he never says nowt uncivil. I doän’t know as I iver knew sūch a storyin’ woman. My word ! them ode mäids ! ”

She looked towards a group of ladies, one of whom was talking vehemently, and the others, following the direction of her glance, paused to listen.

“It really is high time something

was done, and I'm glad the Vicar has made up his mind. I do trust he will make a wise choice. We want a man of sound church principles, especially if he is to live at Sheepbank ; that hamlet is a disgrace to the parish."

She was interrupted by a merry laugh, and "Thank you, Miss Hildred, I'm sorry you have such a bad opinion of us," from Beatrice Foster as she ran off to join her father.

"Just hark to the ode mawps," said Mrs. Bell. "Miss Beetrice äin't no paatience wi' her, law, what a great fine lass she do grow to be sewer; būt 'owiver Mrs. Minton can stan' theer listenin' to sūch cat blab, I can't think."

"Yis," rejoined another woman with a laugh, "we know as you sent her off wi' a fleä in her ear last time she caam to your house."

"She weän't iver set foot o' the inside o' my door no mower, she weän't; the very idee o' coomin' tellin' sūch lies o' a body's bairns; saayin' as she'd seen Jackie steälin' o' her black cūrrants. Why the lad can't abear

'em, he'd goä wi'out his dinner sooner than touch 'em. 'It ain't trew, Miss Hildred,' I says. 'Ain't trew,' she says, 'do yer meän to accuse me o' tellin' a lie?' she says. 'I accuse no one,' I says, 'but it ain't trew, an' I'll uphode it,' then she gits in a great raage an' calls me an' John an' the childer soomthink dreäful, says she'll ha' the law o' Jackie—'I saw Jackie i' my garden as theer's One above,' she ses; then I gits up an' shows her the door an', 'One above, Miss Hildred,' I says, 'maablin's you'd best look out or theer's one below as 'ull catch hode on yow if yer tell such lies.'"

"Coom hode yer noise," growled Bell, jogging one shoulder towards the vestry door, out of which two men had just appeared and were coming towards the gate. Both were considerably past the prime of life, but the Doctor was still brisk and young in looks and manners, while the Vicar's bent shoulders and white hair showed that on him the years had begun to weigh heavily. One glance at him, as

he reached the gate and paused to say a word of greeting to all, showed him a gentleman of the old school. Here was none of the official cheerfulness of the young priest to his flock, but an honest meeting of men of like interests and passions. Not a man among them but regarded him with real affection, not a rough face that did not grow more gentle and lose some of its littleness as he passed by. For this gentleman was always expecting nobleness and truth, and it was given to him to find them where others sought in vain.

They watched him cross the road and enter the Vicarage garden with the Doctor, and a sense of misgiving at the idea of a stranger pretending to fill even the smallest corner of his place pervaded them. Bell expressed the opinion of all when he said, shaking his head slowly,

“I reckon no good ‘ull coom o’ it.”

“Mäister Nugent he lets üs aloän,” said Jim; “he doän’t show a man the door ’cos he’s been known to ha’ a

drop ower mūch once an' agäin. Now young fellers as doän't know nowt—”

“Theer äin't anoother maan like Mäister Nugent i' theäse here parts,” mused Bell, “he knows a deäl. They saay i' Haxby as he's mower knowledge o' law than all them oother mag-estraates put togither, an' he gi's a man jüstice.”

“Well, coom along home, do now,” said his wife, “or the victuals 'ull be done to a rag. I reckon we're to ha' chaanges for better or worse, būt Mäister Nugent 'ull soon git shūt o' any young maan as doän't behave his-self. I reckon it 'ull be a moonth's warnin' or a moonth's waages wi' cu-raates saam as oother folks.”

CHAPTER II.

AT a little distance from Cows-thorpe Station, an old barn stands on the right-hand side of the road. It is here that Dicky the blacksmith plies his trade, and on most week-days the noise of his hammer may be heard from afar. Immediately opposite his forge is the stile over which lies the field-path to Sheepbank, a hamlet consisting almost entirely of Mr. Foster's farm-house, and his laborers' cottages.

On Saturday evening after work is over, one or two men may generally be seen coming up this path to join the group gathered round Dicky's forge, for the blacksmith, beside his regular calling, has constituted himself the village barber. Shaving always takes place outside the barn as the inside is too dark, and Dicky is bound in honor not to get drunk until after this

service to the community. It is said that the number of men he has shaved can be estimated from his condition the next morning, as it is the invariable custom to move on afterwards to the Golden Cross, where Dicky takes his payment in strong liquor.

Waiting in turn for the chair and the razor affords an excellent opportunity for gossip, but it is not often the men's voices show so much animation as was the case on a certain Saturday some six weeks after the new curate, Mr. Harold Champion, had arrived in Cowsthorpe. Of course he was the subject of conversation and also of great difference of opinion. Dicky had been holding forth at some length.

"What I saay is," he continued, turning to address the bystanders while Bell took his place in the chair. "What I saay is, an' wi'out meänin' no disrespect to Mäister Nugent, this here young maan he preäches the gospel, an' mower nor that, I'll saay it's not often as yer can listen to the Word put so pläin and trew i' chûrch or

chapel. I'm a chapel man mysen, havin' led the singin' theer for nigh on twenty years, būt I do saay as I reckon Mäister Champion to be one in a hündred an' I doän't mind taakin' a turn at chūrch now an' agän for to hear him."

Grunts expressive both of assent and dissent came from more than one of his listeners who were lying on the grass at the roadside.

"He fraames well," said Bell, releasing himself from Dicky's grasp on his shoulder to clear his throat and spit, "an' he can talk, niver knew sūch a maan for toongue, you can't saay no to him. Būt he's quiet i' the house."

"Sūch a lot o' fūss as all you men maakes yaupin' about him," said the station master who was sitting astride on the handle of a plough which Dicky had been mending. "He's very well, I dessay, būt I can't stan' sich a sight o' catwab ; I'd a deäl sooner hear the ode gentleman. Mäister Nugent's the sort for me, that he is, he's a fine ode maan."

"Eh ! we know as you're ower lapped

up i' Mäister Nugent since he gaave you that theer bottle o' whisky. That taale's well knowed, but it was afore your time, Kitty."

The individual addressed was a fair little man with blue eyes. Perhaps it was his appearance which was accountable for the name by which he always went, certainly no one ever spoke to him by another, and his patronymic remained a mystery. He had appeared with a tribe of navvies when the new railway to the coast was being made, and when it was completed and the others moved on, Kitty remained behind and got "catch-work" in the coal-yard.

"Let's ha' the taale, Mäister Lowery," he asked, and the station master launched forth at once in his high-pitched voice.

"Theer äin't no particular taale—Mäister Nugent an' me's alwaays been friends, iver since I caam to this here staation. I knowed as he were the right sort first time as I iver sarved him wi' a ticket. I äin't blew ribbon büt I never drink 'cept now and agäin a

mūg o' beer, būt I got drūnk once along o' this how. Theer was a little matter o' business as I wanted Mäister Nugent to sattle for me. Would yer trūst Mäister Champion wi' your business, Dicky? Not you, for all his fine languäge, he's as ignorant—”

“ Git on wi' yer taale, maan, an' let the young 'ūn be.”

“ Well, as I was saayin' the trääins were a bit awk'ard an' I couldn't leäve afore eight. Mäister Nugent was gettin' his dinner. ‘Show him in here,’ he says to the gal, an' I stan's by the door not knowin' jūst how to begin, when ūp he gits, shaakes hands wi' me, an' ‘Sit you down here,’ he says, ‘we're jūst finishin' dessert. Gi' Mr. Lowery a plaate,’ he says. An' theer was a greät ode round glass on my plaate half full o' water, an' I gits that hot yer might o' lighted a match o' my faace, for I wasn't sewer if I should drink the water or what. But Mäister Nugent he teäms me out a glass o' red wine, an' I drūnk that. Well we sits theer talkin', clear forgettin' the time, when presently the ode gentle-

man says, ‘Lowery,’ he says, ‘do yer like whisky? I should be fine an’ pleased for yer to taaste a sup o’ mine as my broother sends me from Ireland,’ he says. An’ nothink would content the ode gentleman but sendin’ the gal to git a bottle an’ we both has a glass. My word! it was a’ter I got out as I began to feel queer. When I gits home an’ into the kitchen it caam into me head as mebbe I was drūnk, an’ I says to myself, ‘If I’m sober I can wind ūp the clock,’ so I reaches the key an’ tries to git it i’ the hole, but I couldn’t maake it goä nohow. An’ then I gits it off the shelf i’ me lap, but it weän’t a bit a good, an I sits theer gittin’ that hot, an’ sweatin’ wi’ fear that Mrs. Lowery should waake ūp an’ find me, till at last I creäps ūp to bed.”

“An’ your missus?” asked Kitty, after the chuckles of the others had subsided.

“She was sound asleäp an’ niver knew. I’ the marnin’ she says, ‘I dunno whatever’s coom to the clock,’ she says. ‘She weän’t goä, she stopped

at ten o'clock last night an' I can't think what's got the key,' she says. An' that very daay down cooms Mäister Nugent i' his cart an' calls me out, an' 'Lowery,' he says, feelin' i' the pocket o' his big coät, 'I reckoned mebbe as yer'd like to ha' a bottle o' the whisky,' he says. Poor ode gentleman, I was fine an' pleased wi' it, an' theer it stan's i' the cūpboard būt I weän't ha' the kerk out. Eh ! theer'll niver be anoother like Mäister Nugent, an' yer'll coom to know it i' the end."

"Well," said Kitty, turning to Bell, "your missus seems quite set o' Mäister Champion. Theer äin't no doubt," he continued, for Bell was submitting to the razor and could not reply, "that he knows how to git round the women. Mrs. Tear now, she's maazin' throng wi' him an' sets a deäl o' store by what he saays."

"An' why?" asked Dicky. "'Cos he's kep' her hūsband awaay from liquor for three weäks, an' by that, he äin't been here to be shaaved theäse three Saturdays. If he caam he couldn't help droppin' in down yonder. Noä,

Jim's done wi' me, he's gotten a beärd
as big as a græt ode goät by this."

"It äin't on'y the women, I reckon," said another man. "Did yer hear tell o' his goin' into the malt kiln t'oother daay an' ketchin' two o' the laads callin' each oother an' usin' languäge soomthin' feärful? I reckon as they'd ha' been fetchin' eäch oother græt sallüps in anoother minute when üp he cooms an' let's 'em both have it, straight."

"An' I'm glad o' that," said Kitty. "I dunno as I've cause to be partic'lar for I've heärd a deäl of sweärin' an' goin' on ower räilway jobs, büt o' all I've iver chanced on, them theer lads at the kiln is the foulest toongued."

"Well I'm tellin' you," resumed the other, "Mäister Champion let 'em ha' it hot, an' afore they knew what they was doin' an' had still gotten theer fists doubled üp, he'd jümped üp o' the steps o' the kiln, an' 'Listen to me, lads,' he says, an' off he goes about fightin' an' sweärin', an' out cooms all the men an' stan's round listenin'. 'Off wi' your hats,' he says, 'an' let's

praay.' An' praay they all does, soom on 'em for the first time since they were childer, I reckon."

"It's a woonder to me as they'll stan' his interferin' wi' 'em," said Bell, "but theer it is, he's sūch a way wi' him, yer can't help būt listen."

"I reckon," said Dicky, stepping back and surveying Bell's face to see if his work was finished, "as Cows-thorpe Chūrch is seein' mower o' Cows-thorpe folk than it's iver done afore, leästwaays i' my time."

"You'll not be so fond o' him, Richard," said Kitty with a chuckle, "if he spoils your traade. Theer's Jim given' yer the sack already."

"I ain't so sewer o' that," said Bell, who was now released, and engaged in swilling his face in a basin of water which stood on the window-ledge of the forge. "Maayblin's yer doän't know as Jim's been awaay the last daay or two—staayin' i' Haxby for chaange o' air," he concluded significantly.

"That cooms o' goin' teetotal," said Dicky, wiping his razor. "He can't

keep it up, an' then the first bout he has he can't carry no mower nor a baabe, the first glass knocks him silly."

"Look yonder," said Lowery, nodding in the direction of the station.

A man was hurrying up the road whom they all recognized to be Jim. His chin was covered with black stubble and his cheeks were flushed with excitement. He shouted to them from a distance.

"Hurraäy, I've gotten here i' time, I was afräid you'd ha' shüt up shop—coom, Dicky, get me shüt o' this beärd o' mine, an' I'll feel a sight mower coomfortable. Maake haaste, maan, do, an' you shall ha' three pennorth o' the best an' goä on till yer've gotten slaaked."

"An' wheer maay yow ha' been taakin' a holidaay wi'out the mäister's leäve?" asked Bell. "Who do you sūppose as had to do your work theäse last few daays?"

"My word!" said Jim, as he sat down panting on the chair, "yer'll speäk a word to the mäister for me, weän't yer, John? Yer see I had them

theer hogs to drive to Haxby Market, an' the wind was that code an' my inside so bad I was forced to ha' summūt, clear forced I was. I hadn't touched a drop o' owt for three weäks, an' that's trew, yer maay ask my missus, an' then I nobbūt had three pennorth o' gin. You ask the gal i' the bar, nobbūt three pennorth an' that's gospil, she'll tell yer. But law it seämed to take hode on me fearful, for when I got outside up cooms a bobby, an' claps hode on me an' taakes me right off to the lock-up. Law, how I suffered wi' the code, they took awaay me necktie, an' on'y give me one small blaanket an' a greät hard boärd to lie on, it's clear shaameful an' me wi' rūmpts that bad, an' theer I had to staay till to-daay when Mäister Nugent caam an' sat o' me."

"Mäister Nugent did, did he?" said Dicky, "well I reckon he'd be fine an' pleased to see your greät, ugly mūg afore him. Why doän't yer coom reg'lar, maan, do yer reckon I'm goin' to blūnt my razors fetchin' off

this here?" Dicky lathered him roughly. "I reckon if Mäister Champion had lit o' yer, he'd a sūng yer a different song."

"Law, I was pleäsed to see Mäister Nugent," said Jim, shaking himself free to go on with his story, while Dicky fell to sharpening the razor. "'Oh, Jim,' he says, 'I'm real sorry to see you 'ere,' he says. 'Yer can't be no sorrier nor I am, Mäister Nugent,' I says. An' when the bobbies had had theer saay, 'I shall be obliged to fine yer, Jim,' he says. 'What mūst be mūst be,' I says, an' it took ivery penny I had i' me pocket, an' I woondered whatever I should do to git back here wi'out a bit o' dinner or owt to pūt strength into me. An' I stan's outside wäitin', for I reckoned as Mäister Nugent 'ud coom out soon, for a bobby was hoding his horse out i' the roäd. An' presently ūp he cooms lookin' that slaape wi' one eye o' the bobby outside the gaate, an' "'ere, Jim,' he says, an' I looked i' my hand an' theer was half a crown. An' I waits till he's driven awaay, an'

then I goes up to the bobby an' 'look here what Mäister Nugent's given me,' I says, an' my word, it maade the bobby look slaape an' all. An' then I goes an' has three pennorth mower gin, an' anoother three I'll ha' wi' you, Dicky, so soon as you've gotten my faace scraaped cleän."

"That yer weän't, Jim Tear," said Bell emphatically. "Yer great maulkin, do yer reckon as Mäister Nugent gaave yer that mooney to weär i' maakin' a gin barrel o' yer belly? Yer ought to be ashaamed o' yourself. You'll goä straight home, that's wheer yer'll goä, an' I shall coom along wi' yer. Dicky 'ull ha' to take his paayment i' coppers this time, an' here's mine."

Jim put his hand up as a sign that he wished to speak, but Dicky kept firm hold on him and plied the razor ruthlessly, only saying—

"Hode on wi' yer, or yer'll git mower nor your bargained for."

The rest were silent, and Bell stood glaring at Jim. It was characteristic of him that though he had little scrup-

ple in getting drunk himself, he hated to see others in the same condition, and as he stood there he pondered ways and means of getting Jim home. He was extremely doubtful of his own powers for all the determination of his voice and manner. All eyes were watching him, waiting for the time when Jim could speak, so that all were surprised by a noise behind them, and looking round they found that Mr. Champion had come up the field-path from Sheepbank and jumped over the stile into the road.

"Hullo," he said, looking at the group with interest. "You're busy as usual, Dicky. I believe this is the best trade of the two."

Bell turned and nodded to him, and Dicky grinned and went on with his work. The dogged look on Bell's face vanished, for he knew that his self-imposed task would now be shared. He took out his pipe and filled it as he leaned over the open door of the forge listening to Mr. Champion's voice, though he paid no attention to his words. The others

answered, laughed, and appeared interested, but Bell only smoked and gazed absently into the distance.

Down the road the landlord had been standing on the steps of the Golden Cross watching the group round the forge, ready to welcome the men when shaving time was over. When the black figure appeared in their midst, he shrugged his shoulders and went in muttering—

“I might jūst as well shūt ūp shop. I’m blest if it äin’t the third Saturday as that damned parson has coom spoilin’ traade. Here, wheer’s that gal; git me a drink, double sharp, yer’ll ha’ no one else to sarve to-night, so maake haste wi’ mine. If this here goes on, we shall ha’ to stock tracts an’ ginger ale.”

CHAPTER III.

WHO has not felt the intoxicating effect of a brisk walk in the strong sunshine, when a cool sea breeze keeps body and mind vigorous? Harold Champion expanded his chest, taking deep breaths and striding forward filled with a half reckless happiness.

Never had he felt more boyish or more confident in himself. Never before had he cast away from him so completely the dreadful memory of certain dark passages in his life, which had sent him weak in body and with shattered nerves to seek the quiet of a country curacy. London, and all that had happened to him there, seemed far away, relegated to the shadowy region of a dead and forgotten past. His returning health, the success of his work in Cowsthorpe, the subtle influence of the bright spring weather, all combined to fill him with hope, to set his imagin-

ation to work weaving day dreams of new joys, indefinite and intangible, yet powerful enough to make his heart beat and his pulses quicken with desire.

Presently he paused, his attention arrested by the queer desolate landscape before him. He had left the road and was attempting a short cut to a cottage that he could see about half a mile in front of him, where he had heard that Mrs. Tear lay ill with ague. Towards the east he saw the yellow sandbanks, and between him and them perfectly flat land divided into vast fields, not by hedges, but by drains, which were distinguishable only by a few pollard willows or stunted thorns growing along their edges. Inland in the far distance, where the country became undulating, one or two windmills stood out against the sky, marking the first rise of the wolds. To the right was the tall church tower and the few houses of Cowsthorpe.

But the sense of sadness so often experienced by strangers in this coun-

try had no power to affect him to-day, and he listened to a lark above his head and moved on again, thinking of the verses,

"Oh to be in England now that April's there."

Suddenly he was stopped abruptly in the straight line that he had been taking. He had crossed two fields and jumped a couple of small drains when he was confronted by one of such a size that he feared the leap would be impossible.

Bell had remarked to him when he started that he would "find it gäiner to go up o' the raamper," but he had disregarded the advice, which, indeed, he had hardly understood though now the meaning was borne in upon him disagreeably.

He looked all round but could not see the least sign of a bridge or of the road. To go back was both ignominious and a serious loss of time. He walked sharply along the drain to the right looking for a narrower place, but the irritating thing seemed to be mathematically exact in its breadth, and he paused just opposite a group

of willows to measure it with his eye. He was so absorbed that he did not see a basket lying on the opposite bank, and half concealed by the willows a face with bright eyes watching him. He only saw that the water was thick with rushes and he went back determined to make a spring.

"Don't jump, don't jump," cried a voice, and he had just time to pull himself up, perfectly bewildered at the sudden apparition.

For there on the opposite bank stood a beautiful girl, laughing and looking at him. Her large straw hat had fallen off as she sprang up and the wind tossed her soft hair about her head at will. He knew her for Beatrice Foster, and yet for a moment no greeting passed his lips, so different did she appear out here in the strong sunshine, her slight figure bending to the wind, from the demure and bonneted maiden who sat so still before him in church. Suddenly she stooped and picked up her hat, losing some of her unconsciousness as she saw the eager admiration in his eyes.

"You see," she said, coming to the edge of the drain, "the bottom is soft, and you'd have got into a terrible mess. I don't think you could have cleared it. Leslie got in here one day, and he took the prize for long jump at Rugby."

"Of course, I should have got in," he said, raising his hat. "But it's very stupid to have to go all the way back. Is there any way nearer? I want to go to that cottage."

She laughed with childish delight at his difficulty.

"You don't understand the marsh country. Wait a minute, can you use a pole?"

She went back to the willows where she had been resting, and returned with a long jumping pole.

"I generally bring it when I come after rushes," she exclaimed, "the finest ones always grow out of reach, besides it helps me over the drains. Now I'll throw it across to you."

He caught it and felt its strength. "Your weight and mine are rather different," he said.

Then for the first time she looked at him critically, comparing him with other men, judging him by those she loved best, her father and her brother Leslie. Before she had only seen him in a surplice and had surrounded him with a halo of mystery and respect due to his position. His words and enthusiasm had stirred her more than anything she had yet heard. But as she looked at him now, she judged him from a different standpoint ; to-day she was his equal, his superior, for she was helping him out of a difficulty. Could he use a pole ? She watched. A slight color had risen to his cheeks, he feared that he should fail while she was looking on, but when he met her eyes he forgot everything but the exquisite charm of her face, and he was filled with one desire, to stand near her.

The next moment he had jumped and stood by her triumphant.

“Very good,” she said.

“It would have been impossible without your pole, thank you so much for saving me a ducking.”

"The bottom is all soft mud," she said, plunging the pole into the drain, and bringing it up to show him. "This is the largest drain about here, and just below Cowsthorpe it joins another, and they empty themselves into the Wash."

He did not answer her, and she glanced at him shyly, turning to pick up her basket. He was racking his brains for an excuse to prolong the interview but could find none.

"That's your nearest way now," she said, pointing out the direction, "you will find Mrs. Tear better, I've just been to see her."

"Then perhaps she won't care for another visitor."

"Oh yes, I'm sure she will."

He turned reluctantly to go, and stopped, for she had seated herself on the bank.

"Shall I find you here when I come back?"

She looked up surprised, and then returned cheerfully,

"Oh yes, I had better wait for you'll want the pole again."

Twenty minutes later he had returned. Mrs. Tear had been a little disappointed with his visit for he had listened absently to her tale of woe, and had not so much as offered to read or pray. If she could have followed him and seen him lying on the grass by Beatrice, she would have understood.

In the distance the old church clock chimed the quarters, yet neither observed how time passed. They were talking, strangely interested in each other's remarks, however trivial, for to them each word and gesture seemed fraught with hidden meaning. And Harold Champion, who for the last few weeks had been rousing even the apathetic marsh dwellers by his fiery enthusiasm, forgot for a moment as he watched Beatrice and listened to her voice, that this world is but a passage to the world to come. Often as he had insisted on the emptiness of human joy, yet now the present satisfied him and he forgot the demands of eternity. The height of his desire was that she should sit on there and

not move, and he grew silent with excess of longing. It was then that she became conscious of a feeling of constraint and rose to her feet. She must go, her father would be waiting for her in Cowsthorpe. She held out her hand, and as he touched it each felt a new sensation, something which sent the warm blood racing through every vein and left a feeling akin to faintness. Around her, as she walked back with a languor quite unusual to her, all nature was bursting with new life. The spirit of the spring was stirring everywhere, nothing was still, all things seemed panting eagerly for a fuller life, a more complete joy. And her nature, now for the first time fully in sympathy with the great world, was turning with gentle trustfulness to love.

CHAPTER IV.

ABOUT half way between the town and station, and in sight of both, Dr. Minton had built himself a comfortable little house. In order to command as distant a view as possible he had made a pleasant drawing-room upstairs, and it was here one Saturday afternoon in May that a little group of people were gathered about the tea-table.

Windows opened to their widest helped to counteract the lassitude of the first warm weather. The Vicar was lying back in an arm-chair watching Beatrice Foster as she chatted quietly with his wife. His old face expressed interest and affection. Beatrice was motherless, and Mr. and Mrs. Nugent having no children of their own, lavished on the young girl much of the love that had never been claimed by nearer ties.

The Doctor was talking to Miss Hildred, half amused, half angry with that lady's complaints and criticisms of things in general.

"I asked Mr. Champion to come," said Mrs. Minton, introducing what she knew to be an unfailing topic of conversation, "but he said he was always busy on Saturday."

"I don't think he will be much of an acquisition socially," observed Miss Hildred, "whatever may be thought of his work in the parish."

"There can't be two opinions about that," said the Doctor, "you like to see a full church, I suppose."

"That depends on the motive which draws people, Doctor. Itching ears, you know. Of course if he conducts the service exactly in the manner of a chapel prayer meeting, it's no wonder he attracts dissenters, but I don't admire him for descending to their level."

"I don't care a snap of the finger about his doctrine, high or low," the Doctor rejoined not over politely, "but when a man is so thoroughly in

earnest as he is, and when he succeeds in emptying the public houses and filling the church, I think he deserves a little thanks and respect. How he does it is nothing to me."

"He's a perfect wonder," exclaimed Mrs. Minton with enthusiasm, "he's brought old Dicky the blacksmith to church, where he's never been seen for twenty years, and he's almost converted the dissenting minister himself, and at any rate rendered his existence useless by emptying the chapels."

"Like likes like, I suppose," sneered Miss Hildred.

"What lies at the root of his influence over the men I can't say," said the Doctor, turning and addressing the Vicar, "but it's undoubtedly strong. It may be merely that he's something new, and yet as a rule Lindsay folk hate changes. Of course he's a fine speaker, but—"

"Perhaps when you've listened to one man most of your life," said Mr. Nugent, "a change is wholesome. There may be something in the Wes-

leyan system. They are too much accustomed to my way of putting things ; and then, of course, rightly or wrongly, out of church I leave them very much to themselves.”

He turned his head towards the window and looked out thoughtfully, and the Doctor felt half sorry that he had spoken. To praise the curate’s work seemed like casting a reflection on his old friend, and he said,

“ After all, it remains to be proved if it isn’t all a flash in the pan. Can the man keep it up,—this enthusiasm ? ”

“ Yes, I think so,” rejoined the Vicar ; “ at any rate during his best working years. If one stops to think one wonders that we are not all enthusiasts. We have cause enough, God knows ! But old age takes the sharp edge out of life, and years ago —well, all one’s traditions were against it.” He laughed to himself, adding, “ When I was young, I should have feared ridicule—considered it ‘ outre ’ to have been seen preaching in the open air. Yes, class prejudices interfere.”

"Of course," said Miss Hildred, "he has no feeling of that kind."

"And for that very reason he is more in sympathy with the people."

"Then you don't consider him a gentleman?"

A shade of annoyance passed over the old man's face as he answered slowly.

"On the contrary, I most certainly consider him a gentleman."

"But his parentage!" persisted Miss Hildred. "I think there is no doubt that he is one of the furniture people, you know that big shop in Bond Street."

"That detestable word 'gentleman,'" Beatrice broke in wrathfully, "when shall we ever get rid of it? oh, what harm it does! He is a man of refined feelings, a University man, and has good manners, what more do you want?"

"Much more, if you please," said Miss Hildred, "precisely that nameless quality that gentleman alone indicates."

"I'm certainly old - fashioned

enough to believe that there is something in breeding," mused the Vicar. "Something—but perhaps it is not of the first importance. That nameless quality you speak of may affect us, I expect it is, if anything, a bar to full sympathy with the poor. However, I for one have not found it lacking in Champion, but whether or no, he has found his way to the hearts of these men."

"If it hadn't been that some one spread that gossip about the shop in Bond Street, I don't believe any one would have dreamed of such a thing," said Beatrice.

"Of course, that is not the chief trouble with regard to him," Miss Hildred said, lowering her voice and taking a seat close to Mrs. Minton. "What really grieves me so much is his ignorance. I assure you last Sunday morning it was terrible, quite terrible, believing as I do, to kneel there and watch the Sacred Elements so mishandled. Mrs. Minton, he does not know how to officiate, and as a member of the E. C. U., it would be

wrong for me to receive the Sacra-
ment again from his hands."

"What on earth does he do wrong?" Mrs. Minton exclaimed in bewilder-
ment, for she was entirely ignorant of
Ritual, and when Miss Hildred began
a detailed explanation her attention
wandered and she listened to her hus-
band who was saying,

"They may like his preaching, cer-
tainly he has the gift of the gab, but
when they are in real trouble they
will not go to him. They run after
him just now, but you wait, he hasn't
the knowledge or experience to help
them so effectively as you can, and
they know it."

The Vicar looked up amused.

"Really, Doctor, I believe you're
jealous for me, and you make out such
a poor case, they will fall back on me
for 'things temporal.' Well, Bea-
trice, we shall have to get your father
to talk to the Doctor. He can't speak
too highly of him. You see if he
makes Bell a sober man, he'll do Mr.
Foster a good turn into the bargain."

"And poor Mrs. Bell," said Bea-

trice, "very few people know how hard her life is."

"Hark! what's that?" said the Doctor.

The talking ceased, and all looked towards the open window. Something in the nature of a cheer came to them from the direction of the Railway Tavern.

Beatrice ran to the window and leaned out. In the distance she could see the sign of the Golden Cross swaying backwards and forwards in the evening breeze. Before the door, mounted on a cart, a black figure was evidently addressing a knot of laborers. Listening attentively she could hear, now that the occupants of the room behind her were still, an impassioned voice she knew well. The Doctor and the others crowded round the windows to look and listen too. Then Beatrice saw the black figure jump from the cart, one of the laborers went to the horse's head and began to lead it, while the others followed behind.

A strange excitement mastered the

girl as she watched the procession moving up the road. As they approached she recognized that they were mostly Sheepbank men, Bell and Jim Tear, and others. The cool breeze fanned her hot cheeks and bore up to the window the sound of men's voices singing, and she could distinguish the clear tones of their leader as he threw back his head and sang with all his soul,

“Onward, Christian Soldiers,
Onward as to war
With the Cross of Jesus
Going on before.”

CHAPTER V.

MRS. BELL stood at the gate of the farmyard looking up the road, an anxious expression on her worn face. Behind her the two children were chasing each other round and round the stacks, filling the air with their shrill cries.

"Be still this minute, can't yer," shouted Mrs. Bell over her shoulder, "I couldn't hear not if theer were fifty haay wagons up o' the raamper whilst you're screechin' like that, let aloän one empty mück cart. Be still, Liza, an' coom you here, Jackie, or I'll warm your jacket."

The cries ceased, and presently the two children appeared from behind the barn and came down to the gate, where they sought to ease their enforced silence by making hideous faces at each other through the bars.

"I can't hear nowt," said Mrs. Bell, more to herself than to the children. "Three Saturdays he's brought him home, but I reckon nothink short o' a miracle 'ull git him to-daay. Hark! What's that? Well! I'm blest!"

The rumble of cart wheels could be faintly heard in the distance, and Mrs. Bell went out into the middle of the road, her face glowing with excitement.

"Yis, thee're a-coomin', theer's two, theer's three, I reckon theer's fower on 'em. Yis, an' that theer great tall 'un 'i froont wi' the parson 'ull be Bell. Here, you coom back, yer great idle bairns, an' git a cūp o' teä ready for your father. Doän't stan' gawmin' at me, yer silly gomerils. Your father's coomin' back, I tell yer."

The children scampered off and Mrs. Bell followed them to the house, shouting all the time.

"Here, you Liza, warm the pot, an' you Jackie maake soom toäst. Father he looves a bit o' hot toäst to his teä, he do. Maake haaste, theer's good bairns, an' I'll set the cloth. Father

'ull be a minute seein' to the hursé.
Law, I niver beleäved he'd coom, or
I'd a' set it ready."

"What's the ewse o' maakin' teä,"
said Liza, "father niver taakes teä
when he's i' liquor, an' it's Satur-
daay."

"Hode yer noise, Liza, yer reckon
yer know iverythink! How can you
tell what he taakes an' what he doän't
taake, when I sends yer off to bed
reg'lar ivery Saturdaay for to git yer
out o' his waay? Yer father's as sober
as I am or he wouldn't be coomin'
home at this time. Now if you're
good an' doän't teäse yer shall sit up
a bit to-night. Theer—äin't I got it
set out pretty, a bit o' fresh cheäse an'
all. Set the pot o' the hob, Liza, to
draw a bit."

Just as the arrangements were com-
pleted, Bell's huge figure darkened
the door, and he looked in sheepishly.
The excitement of the march home
had passed, and deep down in his
heart he had an uneasy feeling that he
had made a fool of himself. But his
wife was mistress of the situation;

after one sharp glance she knew which way to take him.

"Ow, it's you, is it? Now doän't coom clattin' in wi' your græt howery boots. Git 'em off out theer, do now. Liza, taake your father a cheer out to the door. Whatever's the good o' my cleänin' ūp for Sūnday if you're to coom clattin' it all ūp agäin wi' mück? What wi' you an' the bairns an' Mäister Champion, I niver git set down from marnin' till night. Theer—teä's ready büt it weänt hurt to draw a' bit if yer want to gi' your faace a swill at the pūmp."

Bell retired again for this purpose. Whatever had been unusual and disquieting in the afternoon's experience, here, at any rate, was a return to the normal which set him at ease again, and he came in to tea cheerfully.

Sitting in his arm chair completely tired out, the occupant of the parlor heard much talk and laughter from the kitchen. If things were arranged as they ought to be according to any decent ethical principle, the noise of that cheerful tea party should have

constituted the Rev. Harold Champion's reward ; but as he sat there staring at the tea which he did not touch, Mrs. Bell's shrill voice became agony to him.

Since he had passed up the road under Beatrice's view the whole man had undergone a transformation. Even his material frame appeared to have shrunk and the fire had died out of his eyes. Now that he sat there with every muscle relaxed, the most conspicuous features of his face were the weak chin and the undecided, soft lips which worked every now and then nervously.

For a long time he stared hopelessly before him—brooding—irritated by the noise, and yet not listening to it, until at last, when all had grown still, he recovered energy enough to rouse himself and stretch out his hand for a Bible, which was lying on a little table by his chair. But before his hand reached it there was a gentle knock, and Mrs. Bell entered. Self-absorbed as he was he could not help noticing her beaming face.

"Bell's asleäp," she said in a loud whisper. "Law, sir, do yer think as his heart's touched at last? I wish I could beleäve as he'll keep steady. Law, how happy I do feäl to be sewer. I've not had Bell home on paay daay, not sober, since Liza was born. It was when I was läid aside wi' her that he took to drink so fearful. An' look, he's gaave me it all"—she displayed a handful of silver—"all 'cept sixpence for baccy. The Lord bless you, sir, an' I do thaank yer kindly, I'm sewer."

"Thank God, not me, Mrs. Bell, it's His doing."

"Mebbe," she returned doubtfully, "büt I mūst thaank you an' all. Law," she continued as she began to clear away the tea things, "whatever shall I do if he has anooother bout? He'll be jūst mad, fit to end ūs if he falls back a'ter this. Yer doän't know, sir, how different he is when he's i' liquor. I'm scar'd to death ivery Saturday as he'll do one o' the bairns a mischief; it's not büt what Bell's a kind maan, it's on'y the drink as maakes him kind o' craazed. See you here, sir, you'd niver

beleäve this, wi'out seein' it, not o' Bell—" She came near to him pulling up her sleeve and disclosing an ugly looking scar above the elbow. "That's what Bell did last time he had a bad bout, 'cos I stood between him an' Liza. He'll be the death o' me soomday, I reckon, specially if he falls back now. We mūst keep him from it, Mäister Champion, we mūst, I tell 'ee."

Harold Champion shuddered as he looked at the scar and then into the woman's worn face, and listened to her vehemence. A wave of despair caught him and held him silent. He realized all that it meant to this woman, brave as she was, and his heart failed. She came a step nearer and put her hand on his arm.

"Mäister Champion, sir, can yer do it, can yer keep him from the drink ?"

Her insistence drove him to answer—

"All things are possible to the Almighty, Mrs. Bell. I can do nothing unless it is His will."

She fell back disappointed, and for

a few minutes continued putting the tea things together, then she turned to him again.

"Well, I ain't no scollard, an' I doänt ünderstan' it. Mebbe the Lord could save him, büt will He? That's what I'd like to know; He niver interfered wi' Bell not afore you caam, an' I'd given up hopin' as he'd iver keep from drink, büt now as I see he can, why I'm jüst craazed to keep him from it. If any one can, it's you, Mäister Champion."

"You're wrong, you're quite wrong," he answered with a strange agitation, "to cure an habitual drunkard is quite beyond any human power, only God can do it if He sees fit. You don't know, Mrs. Bell, how it takes possession of a man, no one can understand the awful craving for it, no human strength can resist it, only God can help and He"—he seemed to pull himself up with an effort—"we must pray, Mrs. Bell, we must pray without ceasing, and we must not revile the Almighty if He seems to neglect our prayers. He knows what is best for

us better than we do. He is watching over your husband."

Mrs. Bell did not answer. She folded up the cloth and then stood with her hands on the table leaning over and looking across at him. The sight of her anxious face was misery to Harold Champion.

"He has not touched alcohol for a month," he said.

"That's trew, an' I reckon theer's a deäl in bein' ewst to a thing. If we can ony keep him a bit longer, he'll git ewst to do wi'out it. We mūst divert him o' Saturdaays, an' it's you as can do that, it's wi' divertin' his mind as yer've maade this start. When he's a singin' o' your hymns, an' a shoutin', he äin't no time to think o' the drink. That's how you'll do it, sir, an' mebbe when he's tired o' the hymns an' the preächin' yer'll find soomthink else to divert him, mebbe yer will."

She put the table-cloth away, and carrying out the tray of tea things, she left him alone.

He bowed his head over his clasped hands and prayed.

“Oh, my God, my God, grant that I may be the means in Thy hands of saving this man, grant that he may conquer his temptation, that so this woman may see that Thou only art God, Thou only art the Lord. And grant, oh Most Merciful Father, that I may mortify my body and keep it in subjection, lest by any means when I have preached to others I myself should be a castaway.”

Then a groan escaped him as he lay back in his chair with closed eyes. But presently rousing himself, he began to read the Bible, and to think about the morrow’s sermon. He chose his text and made a few pencil notes, and then fell to dreaming vaguely. He could never do more beforehand ; it was only when he had the rows of upturned faces before him, lined with human toil, that the rush of impetuous words came, stirring him with a strange excitement, and penetrating down to the hearts of the imperturbable race he had come to live among.

When this was done he rose and went out into the quiet night. A cold

breeze was coming in from the sea, but his head was hot and he welcomed it gladly. He went down to the gate and looked across the road. In the distance he could see a light twinkling in Mrs. Tear's window and he stood still, delighting in the vivid recollections it called up, Beatrice in the white gown and large hat, her fair hair waving in the wind, in the foreground the rushes stirring in the water; the picture was complete. During the last week he had been with her constantly, and at each meeting his first impressions deepened. He stood there a long while thinking, and when he turned to go in the mood of hopelessness and despair had vanished. He stepped firmly and held himself erect.

Alone in the world he must have succumbed, the fight was too hard, the temptation too bitter, but in the extremity of his need God had sent aid; on the brink of destruction God's angel held out her hand. A new life opened for him, for Beatrice, if she loved him, he could face and conquer all.

CHAPTER VI.

THE weather was exceptionally good that year, and the hot summer passed uneventfully at Cowsthorpe. The farmers were in good spirits, for there was promise of a fuller harvest than had been reaped for years. By the last Saturday in September, Mr. Foster had only one field of wheat left to be cleared. It was a large one, however, and as the weather had shown signs of breaking, he was making a special exertion to get it in before nightfall. The intense heat seemed almost unnatural, and the weather-wise prophesied a storm. All the week the men had worked on by moonlight, and it needed but one final effort to clear the field and afterwards enjoy their well-earned day of rest.

The wheat had been standing in stook for some days, and the women, being no longer wanted for making bands and tying, had taken to glean-

ing the fields already cleared. Mrs. Bell was going through her household duties with the greatest possible rapidity in order to make an early start with Liza and Jackie, who were already standing on the doorstep with their great calico gleaning bags tied round them.

"Now then, Liza," shouted Mrs. Bell from the kitchen where she was peeling potatoes, "doän't stan' gawmin' out theer, yer greät idle thing. Go you, cleän ūp a'ter Mäister Champion an' dūst the parlor. My word, it's one body's work to be alwaays a'ter you. Gleänin' time an all, when yer know we reckon to ha' a new pair o' boots each out o' the gleänin' mooney, an' plenty o' work to git 'em. Here, Jackie, you go sarve the pig wi' theäse here taäty skins."

Some minutes later Mrs. Bell came out of the cottage, and locking the door behind her she started with the two children for the fields. Jackie carried a basket with pieces of bread and dripping, and Liza had taken charge of the jug of cold tea.

On their way they met one huge wagon coming towards the yard. Jim Tear was leading the horses, and his face looked red and sullen. Mrs. Bell shook her head sadly, muttering :

"It's cruel work harvestin', būt my word for it, Jim Tear äin't stuck to the code teä. If on'y we can git ower to-daay—but I reckon it 'ull be hard work. Mind what you're doin', Jackie, yer tiresome tyke, let your sister be, you're maakin' her slap all the drink i' the floor."

They turned into an empty field and found Mrs. Tear sitting under the hedge waiting for them. The woman looked absolutely cowed and dispirited. She had bad health and was a victim to the curse of the marsh country, acute neuralgia. Mrs. Bell spoke first.

"Marnin', Mrs. Tear. You're nob-būt lookin' baadly. Have yer gotten the tic agäin?"

"Naay thaank yer, leästwaays, no mower nor usual. Naay, I'm jūst bet out, I am. I got no rest last night wi'

Jim. He didn't coom back till past eleven. Law, an' I'd reckoned as how he was cured, but it was that hot yesterday, yer see. Oh dear, oh dear, I dunno what to do, I can't stan' it. We niver 'ad a word all theäse months, an' last night when he caam in, he called me soomthin' awful, an' if I hadn't humoured him i' iverythin' he'd ha' strück me."

Every atom of energy seemed to leave Mrs. Tear as she spoke, and she sat there huddled up under the hedge, a picture of despair. Mrs. Bell's face was white and grim as she looked down at her.

"I reckoned as the harvest 'ud be the end o' it," was all she said.

The children, awed at first by the women's grave faces, soon recovered their spirits, and placing the jug and basket under the hedge began to pinch each other until some ripe blackberries attracted their attention, and they scampered off after them. Then Mrs. Tear asked—

"Your maan—how about him?"

"He äin't broke out yit, but I'm

fear'd o' to-night. Ivery daay he's been gittin' mower irritable, an' I know it's jūst that he sees the oother men havin' sūps o' beer an' he can't stan' it. Then it's so swelterin' hot. Yisterday when I took him his dinner wi' a drop o' code teä he taakes the jūg an' teäms it right out i' the floor 'Theer,' he says, 'I weän't drink nowt if I can't ha' nothink no better nor that,' he says, an' theer he sits scarce eätin' owt for want o' a sūp o' sūmmat to wash it down wi'. I reckon now Jim's broke out nothink 'ull keep him. Whatever 'ull Mäister Champion saay?"

"Mäister Champion äin't no hode on Jim. He's gotten tired o' his hymn singin'. I niver did reckon as that 'ud 'tice him for long."

"Five moonths Bell's kep' sober, an' if I could on'y git him home to-night. Well, I reckon it's not to be. You an' I maay jūst look to wersens, Mrs. Tear. It weän't be no harvest merry maakin' for ūs, I reckon. My word ! you're i' lück to ha' no bairns. It's the fear as he'll do one o' them a mis-

chief as bests me. Coom along, it
äin't no good stan'in' here."

She called sharply to the children, and placed them one on each side of her. Mrs. Tear rose and came up into line, and the four began to pace the field, picking up the stray ears of corn as they went. At the end of the field Mrs. Tear paused and put her hand to her back; the constant stooping hurt her badly, but she never thought of stopping.

"The mäister's a real good un," she remarked, "he äin't like soom on 'em as sends the raake üp an' down fit to tear üp all the stübble, let aloän git-tin' üp ivery gräin o' corn that's left."

"That he äin't," rejoined Mrs. Bell, "see you here, that's a sight o' pieses for jüst one traapse üp. Now, Liza, whatever ha' you been doin', break off the ear cloäse üp, yer doän't want to fill yer bag wi' straw, coom now."

Before starting again Mrs. Bell shaded her eyes with her hand and looked into the distance. Away towards Cowsthorpe she could see the field where Bell was working, and be-

yond that the station. The Golden Cross was dangerously near and the day was growing hotter. She must be punctual with Bell's dinner, perhaps he would not like to slink off before her.

"Wheeriver is Mäister Champion to-daay," she said as they all started once more. "He oughter be on the look out, why doän't he coom out i' the fields?"

But the Reverend Harold Champion was otherwise engaged. At that moment he was on the top of a ladder in Cowsthorpe Church fixing up a wreath which Beatrice had made. She stood at the foot of the ladder watching him and handing him the nails and string.

The church was in process of decoration for the Harvest Festival on the morrow, and Mrs. Minton and Miss Hildred were hard at work in the chancel.

"I think," whispered Miss Hildred over the altar rails, "that it would be far better taste if we ladies were left to do the church by ourselves. It

really makes one quite uncomfortable to see such—”

She glanced in the direction of the ladder.

“ Dear me ! ” said Mrs. Minton anxiously, “ don’t you think the ladder’s safe ? Beatrice is holding it quite firmly ; and they are doing the arches so very prettily.”

“ I’m sure the Vicar would have sent his gardener—there was no need for Mr. Champion intruding himself.”

A low laugh came to them up the aisle, and Miss Hildred looked round indignantly,

“ Really this is too much,” she said. “ The way those two go on is common village gossip, but they might respect the church. Beatrice, one excuses, she is such a child and has never had a mother’s care—but for him—”

“ I wonder if there is really anything in it ; dear Beatrice—it would be a nice match, wouldn’t it ? A young fellow of such promise is sure to get on.”

“ I think every soul in the place is

infatuated about the man ! I should never be surprised to hear there was madness in his family. His expression which people think so fine, well, you watch him, see his face in repose, that's very seldom I grant you, but when you do catch it, a more miserable hang-dog look I have never seen. I must go and get some more green."

"What are you going to do now?" Beatrice was saying as Miss Hildred passed. "You'd better come back with me, I've got the pony outside. I'm going to stop on the way and try and persuade father to come home for lunch. He's been in that last field all the morning."

Harold accepted, and Miss Hildred watched them drive away together in Beatrice's little pony cart. "An entire lack of maidenly reserve," she said to herself as she went back to the altar.

But Beatrice was unconscious of adverse criticism. Probably she would have called "maidenly reserve" affection, and only laughed good-hu-

moredly had she heard. For now, as day by day she grew more certain of Harold's feelings towards her, her cup of happiness was full and she was ready to shower on those around her the surplus of her great content. She drove straight to the harvest field and through the open gate towards her father who came to meet them. While they talked Harold delighted his eyes with the scene before them. One of the great wagons was in process of being laden, moving every now and then up a line of stooks leaving only bare stubble behind. On the top Bell was standing receiving each bundle on his pitchfork as it was handed up from below, and deftly putting it in its place. The occasional shouting to the horses mingled pleasantly with the creaking of the heavy wagon and the rattle of the harness. Presently, as Harold watched, a party of women came up the field carrying baskets. The men left off work and leaned on their forks while their wives unpacked the dinners and chose shady places under the remaining stooks.

Bell came down from the wagon and stood looking at the others, taking no notice of his wife, who asked him more than once where he would sit. He fixed his eyes on Jim Tear who had gone up to the hedge for his coat, out of which he produced two bottles of beer.

"Mebbe you'd like a drop," he said to Bell, "yer can't work all daay harvest time wi'out it. It ain't no ewse thinkin' yer can. Folks can saay what they please, but let 'em coom an try doin' the work dry, an' see how they like it."

He glanced sulkily towards the spot just out of earshot, where Mr. Champion and Mr. Foster were talking together.

Bell stared at him without answering, watching him take the cork out and drink. Bell's expression was almost savage, and his wife put her hand timidly on his arm. He shook her off angrily.

Jim Tear brought the bottle down again and laughed, holding it out to Bell.

"Doän't be a fool, John," he said, "taake what's set before yer an' be thaankful. Why, yer not doin' half the work to-year as yer did last harvest, an' it's because yer've got nowt to put heart into yer. Are yer scar'd o' what the parson yonder 'ull saay?"

"Hode yer noise, Jim Tear," said Mrs. Bell coming between them, "äin't it enew for yow to ha' been roarin' drünk last night wi'out interferin' wi' oother folks as has mower sense? Yow be off, or I'll tell yer a few bits o' trewth about yoursen, I will. Afore Christmas you'll ha' been i' Haxby lockup for bein' disgraaceful drünk, so git on wi' yer."

Her voice rose shrilly, and Jim, who was not anxious that Mr. Foster's attention should be drawn to his last night's debauch, took his two beer bottles and joined the other men.

"Now then, John Bell," continued his wife, "I äin't goin' to be kep' stan'in all daay for nothink, 'täin't likely. Are yer goin' to taake your victuals or aren't yer? D'yer think I've nothink

to do būt to rūn a'ter you an' me busy gleänin' and all? Coom ower here, do now."

She led the way to the hedge under which they sat down, and handed him his dinner. Bell was gloomy and silent; he ate what she put into his hands without remark, while she watched him anxiously, though she continued talking the whole time. When he had finished she offered him the jug of cold tea. He drank some and set it down.

"No mower," he said, "never a drop mower o' that howery stūff — Jim's right, let Mäister Champion coom an' do the work an' then see—I'd ha' had a drop wi' Jim if I hadn't reckoned as it 'ud goä to me head, me not havin' taasted it for so long, an' the mäister set o' gettin' this field in, būt once done work, theer'll be no reäson agin' it that I can see. Now doän't gi' me no mower o' your toongue. It äin't no good, I can't stan' it no longer. Hode your noise an' mind your own business, an' I'll look a'ter mine."

For once Mrs. Bell had nothing to

reply His determined tone left her hopeless and she looked away to where Mr. Champion was standing feeling that even his help would be unavailing. Besides as her eyes rested on Beatrice, she felt that Mr. Champion was losing interest in them, and was busy with his own concerns.

"He's allus follerin' her now," she muttered.

"Yis," Bell grunted, "many's the time I've happened on 'em togither laately, an' the waay he looks at her yer can tell what he's a'ter. He doän't goä about seein' folk as mūch as at first, an' his preächin's gone off I reckon. It äin't that stirrin', not like it was, that it äin't. Well it's naature, he's gotten his courtin' to think about now an' all."

He rose and went back to his work, where Mr. Foster joined him after having refused to go back to lunch with Beatrice.

"You can take Champion instead," he had said. "Mrs. Bell will be thankful to get rid of him for she's glean-ing."

All that hot afternoon while the men worked, Harold lay under the trees in the old farm garden and talked to Beatrice. Often there were long minutes of silence, while words trembled on his lips which yet remained unspoken. A sense of honor he could not stifle held him back. Other words should come first, and these he dared not utter. He could not bring himself to that supreme surrender to her mercy.

When she left him to rejoin her father, he went home and standing by his open window, he set himself to solve the problem which held him silent in her presence. Was he bound to cast a shadow over her pure joy by dragging to the fore a part of his own life that he had buried and was seeking to forget?

From these thoughts he was roused by the sound of children's voices singing. He went out into the lane. Towards the gate the last wagon came lumbering along. On top of the great load of corn sat children waving their handkerchiefs and shouting :

" Harvest in an' harvest out,
A great fat pig in a barley stowk,
Hip, hip, hooraah !
I've slitten my shirt an' torn my skin
To git my maister's harvest in,
Hip, hip, hooraah ! "

Women and men followed behind, and last of all came Mr. Foster and Beatrice. A general excitement pervaded every one and Harold fell immediately under its influence. He joined Beatrice and stood by her while the men began stacking. Presently Mr. Foster who had been giving directions came up to them.

" You'd better not stay, Beatrice, I shall only be half an hour or so longer. Come and have supper with us, Champion, I'm sure you'll get nothing here to-night."

So Beatrice and Harold once more together went slowly up the lane. Mrs. Bell saw them go as she was engaged in pulling Liza and Jackie from under the big wagon.

" Yer greät stewpids," she said, " be off this minute to bed, it 'ud sarve yer right if the big wheels had gone ower

yer. Now doän't let me clap eyes o' yer agäin to-night, or I'll gi' yer what for ! Be off while I find father."

She looked anxiously round, for Bell was nowhere to be seen. He had left the stacking a minute before, giving his fork to another man. Mrs. Bell looked all over the yard and in the barn. Then, a prey to a horrible anxiety, she ran out into the lane and back in the direction of the field where he had been working. She knew that across that lay the nearest way to the Golden Cross, and she knew too that Bell always went to the Golden Cross if he meant hard drinking in preference to the Public House, nearer home. With sickening anxiety she strained her eyes to see. Yes, just entering the gate was a huge figure which could only be Bell's.

She stopped to consider. To run after him would be worse than useless, he was past her control ; and yet as she watched him a wild longing to prevent him took possession of her—a feeling that this evening would be decisive, that it was now or never.

With instant determination she turned and ran back, past the yard where every one was busy, and on up the lane towards Mr. Foster's house. She must find Mr. Champion, he must finish the work he had begun, he must go after Bell. If he could only get there in time. She staggered on blindly, almost falling, for the unusual pace was agony to her, and her breath came fitfully and with pain. At last she was obliged to pause with her hand on her heart, but as she did so she caught sight of Mr. Champion far up the lane. He was bending down towards Beatrice, who leaned against a stile. Mrs. Bell gave a hoarse cry and ran on again, but the two lovers were too absorbed to hear her, and as she struggled forward, she saw him stoop, pass one arm round the girl and draw her towards him. A feeling of ungovernable rage came over Mrs. Bell, and she shouted, "Mäister Champion, Mäister Champion." Her shrill voice rose to a piercing cry. He should hear her; what was he doing here while Bell was on the way to

ruin? They started, her voice had reached them and they came down towards her.

"What is it? what's the matter?" Beatrice asked, but Mrs. Bell had no ears for her. She took Harold by the arm.

"Mäister Champion, quick," she gasped, "goä you a'ter Bell, he's gone to the Golden Cross, oh maake haaste, maake haaste, can't yer! If you rūn straight through yon gaate, an' ower the fields yer may git theer afore he sets to. He meäns havin' a reg'lar bout, an' it's on'y you as can git him off. Why did yer iver meddle wi' him if yer äint goin' to help him stick to it? He'll do soom one a mischief if yer let him drink to-night. Rūn, rūn, for God's saake."

Roused by this passionate appeal from emotions of a different kind, Harold only collected himself slowly.

"I'm afraid," he began, "I've lost any influence I had with him, Mrs. Bell. What can I do?"

"Doän't stan' theer thinkin', rūn an'

fetch him back, mebbe he'll coom wi' yer."

"Quick, Harold," cried Beatrice, catching fire, "run as fast as you can down the lane and over the fields, there's a footpath all the way. Oh, go quick, you can stop him, I know you can stop him."

He had heard his name from her lips for the first time, and his heart beat quicker. She believed in him and told him to go, and with one parting glance at her he started.

They watched him race down the lane at full speed, and then Beatrice caught Mrs. Bell's hand, and pulled her up to the stile where they had been standing. Through the gap in the hedge they could see the footpath Harold would take, and both strained their eyes in the indistinct light. There he was, running not so fast now, but steadily, never pausing.

Then Mrs. Bell sank on the step of the stile and covered her face with her apron, sobbing:

"I reckon he'll be too laate. If Bell's taasted it, he'll niver git him

awaay. Oh, whatever shall we do ?
Oh the poor bairns, an' we so quiet
theäse last moonths."

Beatrice knelt by her, folding her
strong arms round the quivering
woman.

"Don't be afraid," she whispered,
"he will bring him back, I know he
will bring him back."

CHAPTER VII.

QUITE unconscious of the efforts made on his behalf, Bell plodded doggedly forward. The countryman's pace is always slow, but Bell's was even more so than usual. He was for one thing thoroughly tired out, and it was actual pain to him to drag one leg after another. Once he cursed himself for a fool for coming so far after his day's work, but the next minute he was anticipating with keen pleasure the snug corner in the bar and the delightful effects of hot gin and water, a luxury he had been foolish to deny himself all these months. People might say what they liked, he argued, it was one of the few pleasures within the reach of a poor man, and once get used to it there was no doing without it. He thought of all the struggles he had had to pass the Golden Cross these last few months,

and all the hours of misery his abstinence had given him. "Such a sinkin' i' the in'ards," he expressed it to himself. And now here he was going to begin again ! Mr. Champion had said he would soon cease to feel the want of it, but to-night he wanted it as badly, worse he thought than ever. It was no good, he could not go on like this. Mr. Champion did not know what it was, how could he ? Why to-night he felt he must get drink if he had to fight for it. "Mebbe it is the devil inside me, as the parson says," he thought, "an' the devil's a sight stronger nor I am."

As he crossed the plank bridge over the drain which separated the last field from the road, a vision of himself drunk one night in the previous winter flashed through his mind. He had rolled off the narrow plank, and he remembered the start the cold water had given him, and the jeers of the men who had pulled him out. For one minute he hesitated and looked at the Golden Cross over the road. After all that was a mere ac-

cident—he went on again. At the door stood Dr. Minton's horse and cart, and before Bell could enter the doctor came out and jumped in. Bell's hand went up automatically to his hat, though he had much rather not have been recognized at that minute.

"Hullo, Bell," said the Doctor, "got the last load home?"

"Yis, sir."

"That's capital, only just in time, I think. You know the signs of change as well as any one. I expect you didn't like the sunset."

"I doubt it 'ull blow a bit."

"Blow and rain, too. Well I hope we shan't have any sudden changes for the sake of the landlord in there. I'm afraid he's very shaky," he lowered his voice and leaned over the side of the cart looking hard at the man before him. "Fact is," he said, "we can't do anything for a man who has always been a hard drinker, they get completely rotten, no other word for it, rotten, the least thing takes hold of them and kills them. Both the children well?"

"Yis, thaank yer, sir," Bell shuffled his feet and looked down uneasily.

The Doctor gathered up his reins. "Well, I must be off," he said, and then "What brings you so far from home to-night? I should have thought you'd have turned in early after such a day's work."

"I'm jūst goin' round i' the yard to see a litter o' pigs, for mebbe I shall ha' one off Mrs. Martin when we kill wer own."

"Ah, well, good night," said the Doctor as Bell slunk off round the house, and he turned to talk to another man who had come out of the bar.

Bell stood in the yard in the shadow of an outhouse. The lie shamed him utterly, and he dreaded lest some one should come out of the back door and find him skulking there. It was five minutes before he heard the Doctor's cart drive away, and then with an imprecation on all interference with his liberty, he went scowling into the bar. The house was disorganized owing to the landlord's illness, and there was no one to serve him. Fuming at a

further delay, he rapped angrily on the table.

A dirty-looking maid appeared.

"Three o' gin," he demanded.

"Hot or code?"

"Hot, an' maake haaste."

He watched her mix it with eager eyes. An excitement he did not attempt to control took possession of him. He looked round, the bar was empty, and there in the corner was the old seat which used to be his by right of custom. It was five months since he had begun to neglect it. His trembling hand closed tightly on the glass, as he turned and took a step towards the corner.

Then the door was thrown open and swung to quickly behind Harold. Bell stood in the middle of the floor, the glass in his hand, staring at him with mingled rage and astonishment.Flushed and completely out of breath, Harold could not speak, but he strode forward and the two watched each other silently, eyes meeting eyes.

"What do yer want follerin' me?"
Bell asked hoarsely.

With an effort Harold held his panting breath to speak, and only from the fire in his eyes could one have told his intense excitement.

"Give that glass to me," he said quietly.

"I weän't, an' I weän't listen to any mower o' your nonsense, Mäister Champion, so jüst let me be. I tell 'ee it äin't no good. I'm not goin' wi'out a sūp o' sūmmūt no mower. Yer meän well, büt it äin't to be sūpposed as a maan 'ull stan' the parson doggin' him about like as if he were a thief. I doän't want to ha' no words wi' you, so I tell yer yer'd best not interfere wi' me to-night. What business is it o' yourn, I'd like to know?"

Harold did not answer him, but springing forward he grasped the wrist of the hand in which Bell held his glass.

"Give it to me."

"Fool! Git off wi' yer, do yer want to maake me fight? leäve goä—theer—you're slappin' it. Git awaay, Mäister Champion, do yer want me to

do yer a mischief? By God, I'll knock yer silly if yer doän't drop it."

"I daresay you'll hurt me, but you won't touch this stuff."

"Let goä, let goä, yer meddlesoom püppy," shouted Bell. "Here soom one, fetch the p'liceman; what right ha' you to assault me? Hi theer!"

The maid had fled at the first sign of a quarrel and the two men were left alone. At each effort Bell made to shake Harold off some of the gin and water splashed on the brick floor. Suddenly Bell, who was now furious with anger, fixed his free left hand on Harold's throat. A head shorter and smaller in every limb, Harold was forced to retreat before his powerful antagonist. Step by step Bell shoved him back until he had pinned him to the wall. Even then Harold used both hands and all his remaining strength to force back Bell's fingers from the glass.

"Damn yer, let goä, yer bloody fool, or I'll knock your silly head agäin the wall. Git off wi' yer. Ah!"

The glass slipped from his grasp

and fell, breaking to pieces on the floor. Bell withdrew for an instant in surprise, and a faint "Thank God" escaped from Harold.

"Yer damned preächin' hypocrite," shouted Bell, "look out for yersen, here smell o' this," he shook his fist in Harold's face, and then seeing he did not move, he struck him in the chest. "Coom on wi' yer, let's see which is the best maan, coom on wi' yer. Why doän't yer hit, d'yer want me to kick yer like a dog? Are yer scar'd?"

"No, I'm not," Harold answered steadily, though his head was swimming from the effects of Bell's recent grip of his throat, "but I'm not going to fight here. Come out, there's a dying man overhead and the maid's gone off to fetch some one. Come out into the fields where we shall be alone."

The quiet tone sobered Bell's excitement, but he looked in scornful astonishment at the pale face and slim figure before him.

"Come along," continued Harold,

going to the door, and Bell followed. Harold led the way back over the field, towards Sheepbank. For five minutes both men walked in silence, then Harold stopped and turned to face the other.

"There is no one within hearing," he said. "What do you want to do?"

"It äin't fair," Bell burst out angrily, "noä, I doän't reckon as I want to fight now, I could best yer ower soon. Büt how am I to be sewer as yer'll not interfere wi' me agäin? Swear to let me aloän."

"I shall do nothing of the kind. I am bound to prevent you if I can. Besides it was not me who stopped you. Why look at the difference, feel your arm and mine. If God had not been on my side, Bell, I could have done nothing. Thank Him that He has saved you, and let us both pray for strength."

"Now look you here, Mäister Champion, I äin't coom out here wi' you to pray, büt to coom to soom understandin', an' I'm goin' straight back for drink when I've sattled wi' yer, so

yer maay jūst maake ūp yer mind to that. I doän't saay nowt about your interferin', yer meän well—büt yer doän't know what a man sūffers, yer doän't. Nobody does who äin't been through it. I tell yer this 'ere craavin' is stronger than a maan, he can't resist it, so now jūst gi' me your word as yer'll let me be, an' we'll part friends."

Anger had died out of Bell's tone, leaving only dogged obstinacy, and Harold felt that all his efforts had been in vain. There was one more appeal that he might make, but the sacrifice of his own pride was so great that his whole nature shrank from it. While he stood there hesitating, the sudden thought that Beatrice's life was henceforth bound up with his, made his breath catch as he realized too late what a coward he had been to involve her happiness in his own hopeless struggle. He leaned against the hedge and remained silent, till some movement on Bell's part warned him that he must decide. Irrational as he felt it to be, he believed that not only

Bell's fate but his own hung in the balance. Why not let the man go? Had he not done enough, and if he mastered him this time surely the next would prove fatal! After all Bell was perhaps right, the temptation was overwhelming.

How still the night was, how absolutely peaceful after that rush and conflict in the bar. He listened and could hear nothing but the heavy breathing of the man near him. The moon had gone behind some clouds, and he could not see distinctly. Every atom of energy seemed to have left him; he felt unaccountably dizzy and leaned heavily on the hedge for support. Still the question forced itself upon him, was he bound to try this last way from which he shrank?

"Well, will yer promise? I'm not goin' to stan' here all night. I'm off back agäin."

"Bell, don't leave me—pray, pray for help for us both. My God, I want it more than you do. You say I don't understand. Don't understand? Why, man," he put his hand on Bell's arm,

"I'd have given anything for that spirit we spilt on the floor. No one knows, not a soul, and you mustn't tell, but if you don't believe me, come home and I'll show you proof enough. John Bell, if you go back to-night, I shall go too, I can't fight any longer—if it's too strong for you, it's too strong for me."

He leaned trembling on the powerful arm he held, and Bell stared at him, catching a glimpse, as the moon came out for a moment, of a white face quivering with a great anxiety—for a moment only—for then Bell gripped him by the arm above the elbow, and, half supporting him, hurried him along the path in the direction of Sheepbank.

Thus they passed the two women who had been long waiting for their return, and who stood close together in the shadow of the great empty wagon. Mrs. Bell pulled Beatrice even farther into the blackness as her husband went by, and then both smothered an exclamation of surprise. Not till the door had closed behind the

two men did either woman move. Then coming forward they went towards the house filled with vague fears. The lamp was burning in Harold's room, and the blind was up, so that as they approached they could see in.

Harold had thrown himself on a chair beside the table and sat there with his head buried in his arms. The attitude was one of hopeless despair, and through the open window there came to them the sound of deep, panting sobs. Bell stood near him, his face full of pity, and even as they looked, he put his great, hard hand on Harold's shoulder with the gentleness of a child, saying,

“Doän’t now, doän’t ; doän’t taake on like that, sir.”

CHAPTER VIII.

IT was late before Bell came into the kitchen, where his wife was impatiently waiting for him with not a little curiosity. He sat down by the table without a word, and she placed his supper before him.

"I've been tryin' to keep it warm," she said, "but I reckon it must be ower done fit to taake ivery bit o' goodness out o' it."

But Bell made no complaint. Paus-ing after a minute or two, he said,

"Ain't yer a sūp o' owt yer could taake in to him?"

"Mäister Champion? I dunno, I'm sewer, mebbe a drop o' warm milk, or a few broth out o' the pot. I äin't a greät sight o' milk i' the house."

"Let him ha' the milk, mebbe he'll drink that," returned Bell.

He went on with his supper while she warmed the milk and took it to

Harold. When she came back, Bell had drawn his chair to the fire and was staring into it. All the time she was washing up and putting the kitchen straight for the night, she was longing to ask him questions; and it was only with great difficulty that she refrained. Presently she became aware that he was following her about with his eyes.

“How many years since we married, Hannah?”

“Twelve, thirteen coom next Laady Daay.”

“Straange an’ pretty yer looked i’ that theer lilac gown, yer did—I mind ode uncl Jacob saayin’, ‘John,’ he says, ‘yer’ve wedded the prettiest lass i’ the marsh, yer mawn taake care on her,’ he says, poor ode gentleman. Nigh on thirteen years, is it?”

“Liza ’ull be nothink like I was, I reckon.”

“Noä, Liza doän’t feäture you, she’s mower like the Bells, she is.”

“Well, good looks doän’t last long nor yit good tempers, leästwaays not often; sūch a lot o’ worritin’ an’

scrattin' to maake ends meet. Theer I've done for to-night."

She came and stood by the fire. Bell got up slowly.

"I reckon any one could tell as yer'd been handsome," he said contemplatively, "though hardlins what yer were. Law, wasn't I proud the first night as we got into wer little cottage togither. My word ! we had a sight o' kissin' an hūggin' ower the fire."

And suddenly bending forward he put one arm round her and drew her to him, kissing her several times on both cheeks. The old wrinkled face flushed a deep red, and she wriggled awkwardly till she had freed herself from him, then both laughed and looked at each other.

"Yer græt stewpid," said the woman, "coom on to bed wi' yer, what do yer want wi' sūch like at your time o' life? See, yer've pulled my back hair down."

She bent down to light the tallow dip by the last glowing embers of the fire, and then they went up to bed to-

gether, his arm once more round her waist.

And long after they were asleep, Harold, to whom they owed so much, sat on in his armchair filled with despondency. The fact that some one now knew the awful temptation with which he had stood face to face for months seemed to add tenfold to its strength. Bell would be perpetually watching him, perhaps dogging his footsteps. His one safeguard had been that every one believed in him. He had felt his own good influence in the place and it had given him strength. When the old Vicar with touching humility had thanked God publicly in church for having sent a man to help them, who understood so thoroughly the needs of the place, Harold had believed he had a Divine mission, and fired with enthusiasm he had begun once more to trust himself. Now, by the mere confession of a temptation common to himself and the man he had rescued, he felt once more plunged to the level of an ordi-

nary being. He was tortured by the idea that his strength was failing.

And Beatrice—why had he ever allowed himself to dream of her, and to be carried away to a confession of his love? For what had he to offer? Only the ruins of a life of self-indulgence, only the certainty of involving her in a fresh fall. For this terrible madness to which he was a victim would surely overtake him again; struggle as he might, as he had done during these past months, he was only postponing the evil day. It came upon him to-night in full conviction, and he trembled, fear taking possession of him till drops of cold sweat stood on his forehead. God only could help him and he tried to pray. But the old words and trite forms he had used so often failed to bring comfort and hope, and insensibly he fell to reviewing his past life filled with self-pity and self-excuse.

He saw himself as a pale-faced London child, listless and heavy, surrounded with luxury, already growing dependent on outside excitements to

rouse him from the apathy of a weakly constitution. Then as a schoolboy, with his sensitive emotional nature, plunged in the rough discipline of the society of other boys of ruder, healthier physique. Then came a time when religious convictions began to work in him, supplying the excitement for which he was always craving. He remembered the alternate terror and exalted enthusiasm that his unformed mind had experienced under the influence of an earnest minister with a strongly Calvinistic turn of mind. At college the views he had thus acquired had been modified, though never completely eradicated, and it was to the English Church that he finally attached himself.

It was during the years at college that he had become dependent on alcohol, turning to it to steady his nerves during any anxiety, or after any period of nervous exhaustion. But it was only after his ordination with all its attendant emotions that the first signal outbreak had come. Luckily for him it had taken place in

his own home, and no one but those in the house knew from what he had been suffering. But he shuddered as he remembered the bitter humiliation of his convalescence, the distrust of the eyes that watched him, and then the greatness of his resolve for the future, his ideal of a lifetime's repentance. He had not counted the cost. A London East-end curacy, its hardships and excitements drove him after an ineffectual battle with himself to seek strength from his old enemy. At first he believed himself the master, but gradually the insidious habit tightened its grip on him, till after two years he ceased to wrestle with it. This time he foresaw what would happen, and to save appearances he resigned his curacy.

There followed another time of blind horror, leaving him plunged in despair. God had deserted him ; he was predestined to failure ; what was the use of fighting ? It was only terror of his late illness that kept him from abandoning himself to what he had begun to believe was fate. But

constant care and devotion brought back a little of his shattered strength, and with it renewed hope. Then came the offer of the Lincolnshire curacy. His late rector could not speak too highly of his enthusiasm and devotion, and believing as he did that it had resulted in a nervous breakdown, he thought a country curacy was the thing for which Harold was exactly fitted.

As Harold reviewed his life it seemed to him that circumstance had followed circumstance, regardless of his efforts, and beyond the reach of his control. His life was so unlike what he had wished for himself that he fell to wondering if he had really had much share in making it what it was. The arguments of his old teacher recurred painfully to his mind. What if after all he was not one of God's elect? He had long since come to consider such thoughts the outcome of an immoral doctrine, and had earnestly upheld the opposite school. All the old discussions of his college days came surging back on

him. What if after all the Freedom of the Will was but a delusion of the human brain? Impossible—life would be a constant terror, and yet—it was strange, this feeling of impotent captivity—was he free to act as his better nature directed him?

Over-wrought by all the varied excitements of the day, he sat still hour after hour thinking feverishly, and awaking to a feeling of dread when the dawn at last roused him, and he knew that day with all its temptations was at hand.

CHAPTER IX.

THE evening was hot and sultry, and every one was prophesying that the weather would break up with a thunderstorm. Inside the church the atmosphere was close, and stifling. To the neglect of the morning service when the Vicar had preached to almost empty seats, all Cowsthorpe had come to keep its harvest festival at night. For the Reverend Harold Champion was to preach, and on such an occasion the congregation hoped that he would give them a more than usually stirring sermon. Some rumor too had spread of his heroic effort on the previous night, and curiosity was aroused as to whether he would show any external marks of the encounter. There was a feeling of slight disappointment when it was perceived that his appearance was normal—he only looked a little paler, and

his voice seemed to tremble slightly as he read the lessons.

Many eyes were directed to Bell, who, however, appeared serenely unconscious. His attention was fully occupied by his attempts to find Jackie's places for him, nudging him sharply when he showed a tendency to drop off to sleep. Liza who was under her mother's charge was apparently behaving in the most exemplary manner, only there was a suspicious bulge in one cheek, and presently a penetrating aroma came from her neighborhood.

Miss Hildred, whose devotions were somewhat easily disturbed, looked round and sniffed angrily.

"Peppermint!" she said decidedly under cover of an Amen.

"Peppermint?" repeated Mrs. Minton, following the direction of Miss Hildred's gaze, and Mrs. Bell, seeing that Liza was the object of their attention, promptly boxed one of her ears. Liza opened her mouth in surprise, and the offending bull's eye dropped out and rolled under Jack-

ie's footstool. Immediately Jackie's prayer-book fell to the floor, and in stooping to pick it up, he managed to secure the treasure and convey it to his own mouth. Liza whimpered, but it was past recovery, and her only comfort lay in the fact that she had already consumed the larger part.

It was with a sense of true thanksgiving that the congregation rose to join in the harvest hymn. That year there was real cause for rejoicing, for the rich harvest would bring cheaper food and more money to spend in coals during the winter. But to old Mrs. Bell, as she stood there with tears in her eyes, these considerations were lost in a deeper thankfulness and joy. At the conclusion of the hymn when they all sat down she felt for Bell's hand. For many years the end of harvest had been for him a time of harsh temper and heavy drinking, but to-day as he prepared to listen to the sermon, he gathered little Jackie to him, letting the child sleep, while his other hand was in his wife's.

Beatrice too had her own thoughts,

her own reasons for thanksgiving. Harold would doubtless return with them after church and would speak to her father, and then her secret joy would be made known. Yet as she recalled the strange scene of the previous evening, from which she had hurried away mystified and anxious, she could not conquer a sense of foreboding. She had watched Harold through the service and knew that he was not himself, that he was suffering. With the insight of love she observed more than others—he was not attending, his thoughts wandered. Once she felt that his eyes were fixed on her, and their intense sadness puzzled and frightened her. She missed his voice in the singing, and it was with a strange misgiving that she saw him stand in the pulpit.

The rustling of the congregation as they settled themselves down ceased, and perfect stillness reigned in the church. All eyes were on Harold, waiting. Outside it had grown dusk for, when the sun set, dark clouds gathered, making the daylight shorter.

Only the candles in the pulpit cast a pale glow on Harold's face. He opened his mouth to speak and paused, looking, not at the rows of expectant faces but over their heads into the dark arch of the tower at the west end. So rapt was his expression that all held their breath, and not a few turned following his gaze, almost expecting to see some strange, unearthly vision. The cawing of a few rooks in the elms outside was the only sound which broke the silence until a long, low, ominous rumble came from the direction of the distant wolds. The storm was coming—Harold closed the open Bible before him and spoke,

“For he found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.”

The words fell like a cold blast upon the congregation brought there to rejoice, and for the first few minutes he did not gain their attention. His voice sounded thin and far off as the darkness gathered and heavy rain beat upon the windows. He told

them the story of Esau, drawing him as the sensuous man given to self-indulgence, to pampering his appetites, until they gained dominion over him, and he was willing to part with God's most precious gift, his birthright, for a mess of pottage.

"Brethren, what is the deeper significance of this story? It is written plainly in our own lives. We too sell our birthright to feed our appetites, to indulge our animal propensities. We too sacrifice God's most precious gift to us, our power of choice, by repeated surrenders to the domination of our ruling passions. Let me make my meaning plainer. What is this birthright belonging to each man and each woman on God's earth? It is the great fact that we are free, that though we are placed amid manifold temptations and though perils of all kinds await us, yet it is always possible for us to choose the right and to walk in the path of well doing. It is Jehovah who is Almighty, and great though may be the power of evil, yet God is on our side, and we can choose

the good. Brethren, if it were not for this great and glorious truth, how could we endure our lives on earth at all? If some evil power or some blind fate outside ourselves could force us into actions which our better natures detest and abhor, would not life become a nightmare, and we, blown hither and thither at the mercy of our lower selves, should have no choice but to curse God and die."

His voice had risen and the tone was one of vehement insistence, making his hearers uneasy. He put both hands on the pulpit and leaning forward, continued in a lower tone,

"If this is not true, if we are not free but are compelled to do wrong whether we will or no, then God becomes a Devil, Wrong rules the World, and we are damned, here in this life."

The Vicar looked up a little anxiously. These were bold words hardly to be understood by country folk barely yet wrested from the meshes of dissent. Disdain was plainly written on Miss Hildred's features—this style of preaching was so uncultured—but

the congregation was listening, and drawing himself up, Harold continued,

"But you know that this is not so, deep down in your hearts you know that you are free—and yet there may be many among you about to sell their birthright, to sacrifice their freedom for some secret sin. Oh, my brethren, to God is the honor and glory of your freedom, but in making you free, He could not but make you liable to fall, free to part with your freedom, for like Esau, you can sell your birthright. This is the awful thought that should be always before you, this it is which should bring you to your knees imploring God for help while there is yet time. God will not always strive with man—once, twice you may recover after yielding to temptation, but each time the struggle will be harder, each failure will leave you with less strength to resist. And then suddenly, you will awake to the fact that you are no longer your own master, you are no longer free. Oh, if I could but make you see and feel as I feel the horror of this position.

"The man who has sold his birth-right stands alone, isolated even among crowds of his fellow-beings. He can expect no help or sympathy from God or man—he has nothing to look forward to in this world but a life of impotent slavery to his ruling passion ; and, beyond the grave—he puts that thought from him lest it should drive him mad. Perhaps the crowning point of his misery comes when he looks back on his past life, somewhere along the line of his failures it was possible to have repented, to have reformed, he cannot tell exactly when it became too late. Shuddering he sees what the past might have afforded, the innocent joys, the opportunities of high and noble effort which he has passed by, and, with an insight born of his despair, he sees "how much he might have made of this fair world." God grant that it is not too late with you. God help you to remember Esau, to resist each sin as it comes with all your strength, aye, let it be with the strength of despair, for tomorrow it may be too late, one more

failure and you may find that you have sold your birthright, that your power of resistance has left you. Then indeed you are past prayer and past hope, for it may be said of you as it was said of Esau ‘He found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.’”

His voice broke on the last words and there was a solemn hush. He seemed to be trying to regain his self-possession, when, suddenly across the aisles now nearly dark there came a flash of light and a peal of thunder overhead. It resounded in the vaulted roof, rattling the glass in the old windows, and when it died away Harold gave the customary conclusion faintly. With an effort he descended the pulpit and went at once to the vestry, where a few minutes later the Vicar found him lying unconscious on the stone floor.

CHAPTER X.

THE congregation dispersed slowly in ignorance of what was happening in the vestry. A little group of ladies waited in the porch until the heavy rain should cease.

“Well,” said Miss Hildred, “after this I should think the Vicar will be obliged to act. I never expected to sit and listen to such blasphemy even from him. He’s no business to call himself a churchman.”

She got no reply from Mrs. Minton, to whom, apparently the remark was addressed, for Mrs. Minton was anxiously watching Beatrice. The girl stood almost outside the porch, letting the rain drive into her pale face without seeming to notice it.

“It’s not only unorthodox but undignified,” continued Miss Hildred in the tone of one pronouncing the last word on the subject, and she peered

out into the churchyard. Something evidently arrested her attention, for she forgot her best bonnet and let some seconds go by before she drew back her head.

"There's Dr. Minton just gone in at the Vestry door," she exclaimed. "I saw one of the choir boys run after him and another has been sent off to the Vicarage. Some one's ill. I expect it's Mr. Champion. He looked ghastly, didn't he? and I'm sure he could only just get down from the pulpit."

Beatrice turned and looked up the aisle, longing for her father to come. She could not go to Harold, and that added to her misery. Her heart was full and sore, and it was hard to keep up a semblance of indifference before the others.

After a few minutes the Vicar came down the aisle.

"Beatrice," he said, "your father wants you to go across to the Vicarage and wait there for him. Mr. Champion is not very well, he turned faint, but he'll be better soon. Your father

will drive him home and then come back for you. It's not raining so much now, I think you can manage to run over."

He took the girl's umbrella from her and went outside to open it. Beatrice followed, and her eyes sought his appealingly as she took it back. For one moment his hand touched her shoulder gently, as he said—

"It's all right, my dear, he's only a little overdone."

He heard something like a sob escape the girl as she ran away into the darkness, and he went back with a sigh to say a few words to the other ladies before returning to the Vestry.

There Dr. Minton was still bending over Harold.

"That's better," he said, "now let's try and get a little more of this down; hold his head up a bit, Foster, now."

He poured a little brandy into Harold's mouth, and after a few more minutes his consciousness gradually returned, and Mr. Foster and the doctor helped him into a chair. He sat looking from one to the other dazed and

wondering, until turning his eyes to the table he started and trembled.

The doctor poured out a little more brandy.

"Here, drink this, half the other lot went down your neck, I fancy—drink it down."

Harold held out his hand eagerly and took the glass. He was trembling so much that the doctor thought it would fall, and put his own hand to guide it, holding it to Harold's mouth while he drank.

"What makes the man look so frightened," he thought to himself, "fear, abject fear in every line of his face."

Then thinking it better to leave him to himself, the three men stood together and talked in undertones. Glancing at his patient from time to time the Doctor saw that he was beginning to look about him and even to listen to what they were saying. Presently he looked at his watch and got up, steadying himself on the back of his chair. Going to help him the Doctor said,

"Well, that's right, do you feel better now?"

"Yes, thank you. I suppose I fainted."

"Yes, you did, and I tell you what it is, you've been going too fast. Too little food, too little sleep, and too much excitement. You must take it easy for a bit. Have you ever gone off like that before?"

"Once when I was a boy at school. They said it was nearly half an hour before I came to."

"Well, it was over ten minutes this time and that's quite long enough. Foster is going to drive you home, and I'll come in early to-morrow and look you up. By-the-bye, can you make any one hear from your bedroom if you feel ill in the night?"

"Oh, yes, you can hear all over that tiny cottage."

"Very well. Foster, you'll make him go straight to bed, and tell Mrs. Bell to look after him. I think you'll be all right now, but it's as well to be careful. Have you any stimulant by you? No, I expect not. Well, you'd

better take this to-night, and to-morrow I'll give you a prescription which you can keep by you in case of emergency."

A few minutes later Mr. Foster was driving Harold towards home. The fresh air cooled by the rain revived him, and by the time they reached Sheepbank he was feeling almost himself again. Mr. Foster called Bell to hold the horse while he gave Harold an arm upstairs. He insisted on seeing him in bed before he went, and left him to give Mrs. Bell her instructions. When he came back to say good-bye, he stood for a few minutes chatting, and then said,

"I've told Mrs. Bell to bring you some food, and mind you do your best to eat it. I don't wonder at your being a bit overdone, you put such an amount of life into your sermon. It's a lesson we should all do well to learn, terrible and true, as far at any rate as this world's concerned. Well, I must go—but first let me put this table with the brandy within your reach."

As he held out his hand, he was

struck by the same look of fear on Harold's face which had puzzled the Doctor.

"You don't mind being left—you're quite sure! I'll stay with you if you feel the least nervous."

"Oh, no, certainly not. I'm quite right again now. I wouldn't keep you for worlds. I think I shall soon be asleep."

So after a few more hearty words Harold was left alone. He turned on his side and lay looking at the table by his bed. His face hardened, a dangerous light shone in his eyes, the taste of brandy was still in his mouth, and he laughed unpleasantly, for he knew that he was alone in an unequal fight, and the misery of his defeat was past.

CHAPTER XI.

"Hi! Mrs. Bell," the Doctor shouted, for he had knocked twice at the kitchen door without receiving any answer. He stamped, impatiently, on the step, for it was pouring with rain, and some big drops from his hat had begun to trickle down his neck. "Where on earth can they all be?" he thought, "Champion at any rate must be in."

He went round to the front door and tried it, but it was locked. The blind in the parlor was still down and he said to himself,

"I suppose he's not up yet; well, that's the best thing he could do, perhaps he's asleep."

He paused, uncertain what to do, when his attention was attracted by a high-pitched voice in the barn. He went off at once towards it, and as he drew near he could hear the regular

swish, swish, of a chaff-cutting machine which formed a sort of accompaniment to Mrs. Bell's shrill tones.

"I goes ūpstairs o' tip toe wi' a drop o' hot teä an' a little sūp o' milk I'd saaved o' purpose, I did, an' I knocks būt theer wasn't no answer, an' 'mebbe he's asleäp,' I says, so I taakes the teä down agäin an' sets it o' the hob to keep warm, an' then I fetches a few sticks for I reckoned I'd put a bit o' fire i' the parlour, as 'ud do no harm this here daamp daay an' 'ud mebbe look coomfortable when he coom down, for he do seäm as he wants a bit o' shepherdin' ūp, do Mäister Champion, so I gits the paaper and matches an' a säp o' laamp hile for to maake her goä, not havin' been kindled sin' the fore end an' me reckonin' as the chimney 'ull mebbe smoke, an'—

"Marnin', sir," said Bell, who from his position could see the Doctor as he came into the barn. Mrs. Bell turned round.

"Good marnin', Doctor, well to be sewer!"

The Doctor nodded, and for a min-

ute watched Bell in silence as he went on with his work, swaying his body slightly as he threw his weight on the handle of the machine, which seemed to revolve under him without effort.

"Well, how's Mr. Champion this morning?"

"Dunno, I'm sewer, sir. I'd just coom out to tell Bell, we reckoned as he was sleäpin' laate, būt he's gone."

"Gone?"

"Yis, afore we was ūp an' all, an' left theäse here on the parlour taable, mebbe yer could maake mower on 'em, I äin't much of a schollard."

She handed him two envelopes.

"That's for the Vicar, this is to you."

"Dear Mrs. Bell,—Will you let Jackie take this note to the Vicar? I am going away for a few days' rest. Expect me back on Saturday for supper. Yours,—Harold Champion."

"Yis," said Mrs. Bell with a tinge of triumph in her voice, "that's jūst what I reckoned it said, 'back o' Saturday,' wasn't it, Bell? Būt I can't see

no sense i' rūnnin' off wi'out a sūp o' owt to warm his inside, an' teämin' an' silin' fit to drown o' body."

The Doctor looked at Bell, but he never paused in his work. The chaff poured down, and the swish, swish continued with perfect regularity. The Doctor saw that there was nothing to be obtained from him, and he knew by experience that his wife would tell all she knew without waiting to be asked, so he took his leave.

Directly afterwards the supply of hay ran out, and Bell paused.

"See you here," he said to his wife, "you git this filled up, an' wäit here for me. I mūst go see to that hursé as has gotten one leg foundered up. I'll be back i' a minute."

He left the barn, and looking round guiltily to see if he was out of her sight he went towards the house as quickly as he could. The back door was unlocked, and he went straight upstairs to Harold's room. Opening the door softly he stole in. The bed lay all disordered, and by its side the table with an empty bottle and glass.

Nodding his head as if he were not surprised, he lifted the glass and smelt it.

"I reckon mebbe Hannah 'ull forgit all about this 'ere if she doän't see it," he muttered. He washed the glass with elaborate care, and returned it to the cupboard in the kitchen. Then taking the empty bottle, he was about to throw it on a heap of rubbish behind the pig-stye when he paused. "Naay, I weän't breäk it," he said sorrowfully, "I'll hang it up i' the barn, it 'ull mind me o' the consequences o' sin. God forgive us. Law, I wish I knew wheer he'd gone, büt it doän't matter, it äin't the loikes o' me as could help him. I reckon he'll ha' taaken träin afore this."

Meanwhile the Doctor drove back to Cowsthorpe, taking with him the note to the Vicar, and the news of Harold's abrupt departure. The story spread with the usual speed, and the next five days were spent in discussing it. Many and varied were the conjectures put forward, agreeing in nothing but the certainty that there

must be a mysterious reason for that early flight.

To Beatrice the excited gossip that buzzed about her was little short of actual pain. She could hardly bear to sit by and listen. Ardently she longed for some one to whom she could speak openly, but the shadow of mystery which hung over Harold made the girl shrink into herself. A great fear possessed her leaving to her pride but one miserable satisfaction—unless Harold came back strong and true, no one should ever know what he had said to her in the lane. Sometimes she wondered if she had anything to do with his abrupt departure, but she could not believe it, for she remembered now with something akin to shame how little cause she had given him lately to doubt her affection. His apparent cruelty made her anger rise against him, but this mood would pass leaving her longing for him all the more passionately because she felt the need of some explanation of his strangeness. The memory of his face as she had last seen him in

the pulpit haunted her, and she shuddered again, as she had shuddered at the time, at the picture of despair he had drawn.

Each day as it passed left her more hopeless, for each day she watched for the postman, and he came and went, leaving her nothing but disappointment. She avoided speech with everyone and stayed much at home. Her father left her to herself, saying nothing even if he observed her pale looks and forced cheerfulness. She never knew how much or how little he guessed, but from the bottom of her heart she was grateful for his silence, valuing it above all sympathy that could have been expressed. She believed that Saturday would end the time of waiting ; but, when Saturday came, she rose from her bed in the early dawn conscious of no relief, only of fear. Towards afternoon restless misery drove her to seek the relief of a long walk. In that bare, sparsely inhabited country no one need seek long for solitude, but if one place promised it with even more security

than another, it was the desolate sea coast, and towards this Beatrice set forth, feeling that it would be in sympathy with her loneliness.

When she neared the coast, she took a road running on the land-side of the huge sandbanks in order to avoid the outskirts of a dreary, half-built watering-place, now nearly deserted for the winter months. But when she had passed a mile or so beyond fear of parades or belated donkey boys, she crossed a bare stretch of waste land, and climbing up the bank, sinking deeply into the silver sand at every step, she stood panting on the top. The wind whistled in the tall blue grass beneath her feet, catching up the light sand and whirling it in all directions. Below her, but now some way off, the sea retreated lazily. On one hand a bend in the yellow sandbanks hid the watering-place from view, while southwards she could see the miles of level sand and mud which form the Wash, bordered in the dim distance by the line of the Norfolk coast.

There was not a human creature to be seen, there was nothing, when she had run down on the shore side and was walking on southwards, to mark one mile of sand from another. Every now and then she crossed a breakwater, every now and then some spars and planks thrown up during a recent storm. Some dry wood under shelter of a breakwater tempted her to rest and she sat down. Then the dreariness of the scene took complete possession of her. The dull gray sky, the vast expanse of bare sand, the wind whistling and shrieking through the grass on the banks above her, all combined to deepen the sense of inevitable sadness which held her, sitting motionless, watching the sleepy sea until it had become little more than a restless line in the distance. Tears rose to her eyes, and the effort to restrain them spurred her to action and she stood up, but for a minute the whole of the gray desolation before her was blotted out by a mist still more desolate. The thought was, "Just a week ago

to-day and what a difference!" The delicious dream of happiness flashed back on her and faded, leaving her life empty. Why she must suffer, how Harold was suffering, remained a mystery, but she no longer tortured herself to solve it. Resolutely she set her face towards home, and as she trudged on mile after mile, she did not think, physical fatigue had made her mind a blank.

About half an hour from home she overtook and passed Bell who was sitting on the edge of an empty cart allowing the great, heavy horse to take his own pace towards the stable. Bell touched his hat and she nodded, but contrary to her usual habit she did not stop and speak to him, but hurrying on soon left the lumbering cart behind. Turning a sharp corner she faced a mile of perfectly straight road, with a drain on either side and here and there a few stunted thorns or pollard willows. Not a soul in sight, she could not even see a cottage in the distance. She was not given to nervous fears, but half involuntarily she

paused feeling glad to hear the sound of Bell's heavy cart as it came slowly along. But what made her listen more attentively was another sound. A voice, a man's voice, singing. It was growing dusk, but there was still light enough to see some way, yet she could see no one. But the voice was singing not very far off, and now the words reached her, though thick and indistinct—

“Ring the bells of heaven,
There is joy to-day.”

A laugh. “Well, must be gettin' home, s'late I think. I feel much better, better than I've been for a long time,” then from behind a large heap of stones where he must have been lying, a man rose and staggered forward. His legs bent under him and in a minute he had reeled to the opposite side of the road where he stood unsteadily.

Beatrice's first feeling was one of annoyance. It was evident the man was drunk and she was doubtful if she could pass him unobserved. However, it was late and she was anxious

to be home. She watched his unsteady movements, feeling that she could easily distance him if he offered to molest her. As she approached keeping on the other side of the road and never taking her eyes off him, she pulled up short, arrested by an idea which made her heart beat wildly. There was something strangely familiar about the figure. He had paused too and seemed to be listening, then he broke out into a few lines of an old college song and tried to run forward. His foot caught on a stone and he tripped, falling heavily on his face ; his hat rolled off, and he lay there crying with the half-frightened, half-angry tone of a child who has been hurt.

In a second Beatrice stood over him. Nearer and nearer behind them came the rumble of Bell's cart. The girl's breast heaved : she was possessed by one idea and in her impatience to save him from exposure she found words.

“Get up, Mr. Champion, get up and stop crying. Bell's just behind and will hear you.”

Surprise quieted him and he managed to get to his feet.

"Beatrice, is that you? I'm sho pleased to see you," and he came towards her. "I'm comin' to see your father s'evening. Let's walk home together."

Beatrice slipped past him, shrinking away as he approached unsteadily. She was trembling with shame for him and for herself, but the cart was almost upon them and she made one more effort.

Harold had walked on without his hat. She picked it up and followed him. He took it with effusive thanks, and tried to take her arm. Mastering herself with a great effort, she repulsed him.

"Mr. Champion," she said, standing a little way from him, "you've been drinking, and you're not yourself. Can you stand still and not move or speak while Bell passes? He's in that cart. Oh! don't disgrace yourself before him."

But the silly smile with which he looked at her, his bloodshot eyes and flushed face scratched and bleeding

from his fall, his untidy clothes covered with mud, all combined to destroy her last hope. She turned away from him with a stifled sob.

He followed expostulating, pleading with her, and denying that he was the worse for liquor in language which appalled her from his lips.

Then she stood still—Bell was now in sight, and she knew that she could not save him. White to the lips she faced him, and caught and held his shifting glance. Something there was in her looks which penetrated even to his dull brain. Something so piteous and appealing that he quailed before her, and turning away began to cry miserably. She never moved a muscle of her face, now grown hard and stony. Slowly the cart reached them, and at a gesture from her, Bell stopped looking down wonderingly at the two. She stepped forward, reaching up to Bell so that he only caught the words:

“He’s—drunk—can you get him home without any one knowing? Say he’s had another fainting fit.”

The rough face looked down at hers blankly for what seemed a full minute, then at Harold who had ceased crying and was staring up stupidly. Then a look came into Bell's face which brought the tears to Beatrice's eyes, a look of such great tenderness and pity that even in her own trouble she found time to marvel at the man. Slowly he swung his huge frame down from the cart, and taking Harold by the arm he forced him, resisting feebly, to get in. Then he shouted to the horse, and without a word or a look back they were on their way.

Beatrice stood in the middle of the road watching. She saw Harold slip helplessly until he lay full length in the bottom of the cart. Then Bell took some pieces of old sacking on which he had been sitting and threw them lightly over the prostrate figure.

So jolting and jogging along painfully in an empty muck cart, the Reverend Harold Champion returned to Sheepbank.

CHAPTER XII.

OUTSIDE the rain was falling with dull persistence, and the station master had lighted a fire in his inner office, and round this his friends were gathered. Jim Tear had just confirmed the rumor which had at first been received with astonishment and disbelief. But now the blacksmith's loud protestations of faith in the young curate were silenced, and Lowery was indulging in the exquisite pleasure of "I told you so."

"Stūff an' nonsense," said Dicky angrily, "we know you hadn't niver a good opinion of him, būt yer niver guessed this, so hode yer noise."

"It cooms o' sūch a sight o' fine preächin'," said Jim Tear with a tone of triumph. "Būt Mäister Lowery niver was taaken wi' that. It was you Dicky as was most set o' him."

"Richard, Richard," said Kitty,

with a twinkle, "it 'ull be a long time afore we taake your opinion agäin. Now Mäister Lowery advised us to follow the ode 'un."

"I woonder what Mäister Nugent thinks o' it, poor ode gentlemaan," said Lowery. "I reckon he'll taake it to heart a deäl."

"An' I woonder what 'ull becoom o' the young maan," said Dicky, "they oughtn't to 'et him coom deceivin' folks."

"A maan can be a good maan and yet drink," Lowery answered decisively. "My father was one. A better, gentler creature niver breäthed, yit he was drünk reg'lar as the chûrch clock ivery Saturday night. I mind how my moother ewst to coom to the pûblic for him, if it got so laate she reckoned as he'd be past walkin'. A fine greät woman was my moother. She'd git our ode donkey i' the cart an' off she'd goä. An' very like she'd find father fast asleäp i' the bar. She'd ketch him up i' her arms, for he was bût a little maan, an' she'd carry him out an' fling him i' the cart bot-

tom an' off she'd coom home. Many's the time I've stood at the gaate an' watched her coomin', poor ode laady! An' once git him back she'd skelp up the cart an' slither the poor ode maan out o' the mück heäp. 'Theer,' she'd saay, 'that's a fit bed for a drünken sot, yow lig theer,' she'd saay, an' yer weän't taake no paayment while marnin'."

Some one opened the outer door and disturbed the station master's reminiscences. It was the Doctor, and Lowery went to his little window to give him a ticket.

"Third to London."

"Bad daay for a journey, sir," said Lowery.

"The ticket is not for myself," the Doctor answered shortly, and he went out into the rain.

Lowery prepared to follow for the London train was nearly due. Just then the Vicar's shut carriage drove up and the Vicar got out and talked to the Doctor.

"Woonder they doän't step inside," said Lowery. "Mäister Nugent 'ull

ketch his death. Law how it teäms
an' siles."

"My word!" exclaimed Jim peering
out, "that's Mäister Champion they've
left i' the carriage."

"Lowery," called Mr. Nugent, "will
you send some one to see after this
luggage?"

Lowery went out himself and the
other men watched from the window
in silence. The train came in and
Harold Champion walked up the plat-
form as if in a dream, his white face
perfectly expressionless. The Doctor
and the Vicar followed. The old man
took his hand and tried to speak but
his voice broke and no words came.
The Doctor hurried Harold into a
carriage and closed the door retreat-
ing on pretence of looking after the
luggage. There stood the old Vicar
trying to find words till the engine
whistled and the train moved slowly
away. There he stood blinded by
tears until the Doctor came back and
taking him by the arm walked with
him down the platform, past the row
of silent men who had come out of

the station master's room to see Harold go.

Lowery came forward and opened the carriage door touching his hat respectfully. The two old friends got in and were driven away.

"Poor ole gentleman," said Lowery, "he's that tender-hearted."

CHAPTER XIII.

It was Sunday morning one breezy day in the April of the following year. Bell stood in front of his cottage leaning against the wall and basking in the strong sunshine. His short clay pipe was between his lips and he was meditating. Presently a little ash fell on his trousers and he hastened to brush it off. He was in his Sunday best, and his embossed velvet waistcoat, the surviving relic of his wedding day, contrasted oddly with his shirt sleeves, for his black coat hung, out of a regard to economy, behind the kitchen door.

In the kitchen, Mrs. Bell was standing over the fire performing the important duty of “gittin’ a bit o’ hot meat” ready for the Sunday dinner. When she thought she could be spared for a minute she came out into the open doorway.

"Ain't yer goin' to chūrch?" she asked.

"I doubt not. Are you a-goin'?"

"Naay, I've gotten the dinner to see to."

Bell took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at it. It was empty.

"Maayblins I'll coom in an' reäd yer a chapter out o' the Book, an' that wi' ode Dicky's meätin' to-night 'ull sarve us to-daay, I reckon."

He came into the kitchen, and fetching the great illustrated Bible from its place on the round table in the parlor, he sat down and began to turn the leaves. Meanwhile his wife talked.

"Mrs. Nugent were in o' Tuesdaay, an' she says, 'You an' your hūsband äin't been so reg'lar at chūrch laately, Mrs. Bell,' she says. 'Noä,' I says, 'we äin't, you're right theer,' I says. 'An' how is it,' she says. 'Dunno,' I says, 'it hardlins seäms the saam thing now,' I says. An' then she talks a deäl 'bout neglectin' the meäns o' graace an' the house o' God, real fine she talked, she did, till I

says, ‘well,’ I says, ‘yer mūst talk to Bell, mebbe he’ll think sūmmūt o’ what yer saay,’ I says.”

“It may be wrong,” mused Bell, “I dunno I’m sewer, būt I can’t ower set it. I can’t abeär to goä, an’ that’s the trewth. As soon as iver I get setten’ i’ me seät, it all cooms ower me jūst as if it were on’y yisterdaay, an’ I can’t seäm to listen to owt, on’y keeps saayin’ to mysen, ‘Poor young maan, poor young maan, I woonder wheer-iver yer are, an’ what’s happenin’ to yer.’”

He leaned his elbows on the table and sat gazing out of the window. A saucepan boiled over and required Mrs. Bell’s attention ; when the hissing had ceased Bell continued—

“It ’ull be a year to-daay sin’ he first preäched i’ Cowsthorpe church.”

“Deary me, how time does pass.”

“What beäts me is why we niver hear tell o’ him. I want to know if any o’theäse here folks ’as iver tried to help him—to git him started fair again.

“I reckon as he’s very near forgot-

ten i' Cowsthorpe for all the talk it maade at the time, folks seäm to ha' settled down agäin woonderful, though they do saay as it were a greät trouble to Mäister Nugent, as he took on about it soomthink fearful."

"Maayblins it was worse for Mäister Champion. Law, to see his face i' the Moonday when he sent for me up i' the chaamber an' maade me tell him how we'd happened on him. I didn't want to tell him, büt he kep' on askin' till I was forced. I doubt he didn't remember mūch, an' when he says, 'Did any one büt you see me, Bell?' I couldn't speäk for shaame. 'Please tell me,' he says. 'One oother,' I says, so low I woondered if he'd hear me, büt he did, an' looks at me fit to maake a maan cry out wi' the pän o't. His mouth was open an' it seämed as if his toongue was ower dry to speäk, büt at last he says, 'An' she was?' he says. 'Miss Beatrice,' I says, lookin' awaay, for I couldn't abear to see his faace, it was that white he might ha' been läid out. 'I remember,' he says, as though he were

talkin' to hisself, an' then I looks agäin an' theer he was starin' right afore him, an' I turns an' cooms down here."

"Yis," said Mrs. Bell, taking up the oft-told tale, "yis, an' I mind how mad you was wi' Dr. Minton an' Mais-ter Nugent when they caam an' talked to him. We heärd 'em givin' it him fine through the door an' he niver an-swerin' 'em not a word. We niver could maake out who tode on him, büt how-iver afore the weäk end, ivery soul i' the place was chatterin' about it. Miss Hildred said she'd guessed it all along. Law, sich a parle as it maade. Yer see he oughter ha' been i' chürch o' the Sūndaay an' he were lyin' fast asleäp all daay. I alwaays reckon'd as he confessed to Mäister Nugent all about it, for the ode gentleman was a deal softer to him than the Doctor. Then Jim Tear 'ud seen him coomin' out o' that theer public house agäin the coäst. They reckoned he'd been i' Loondon all the weäk an coom home wi' one'o' them theer cheäp seä-side tickets."

"He tode me as he felt it a coomin' on, an' went awaay to try an' git it ower, būt the worst o' it is that a maan doän't know when he's drūnk, an' he caam back ower soon. Būt they sent him awaay ower quick, he were hardlins fit for the journey. It were on the Tuesdaay as Mäister Nugent fetched him awaay i' his carriage."

"Yis, an' we'd all his things to pack an' send a'ter him to Loondon."

Bell continued his sad stare through the window. His wife looked sharply at him, she knew he saw nothing, and she was not surprised when presently a large tear fell on the open Bible.

"Ha' you heärd about Jim Tear?" she asked to change the subject.

"On'y that they've sent him to jäil for a moonth. Jim's like the rest, it's ta'en hode on him ower fast. It äin't no ewse sendin' him to jäil, he'll jūst ha' time to git mad for it, an' I'll waa-ger he'll be drūnk the first Saturdaay he's out agäin."

"I reckon he was real scar'd this time howiver. It was along o' that

as the perliceman lit o' him, an' he gives the perliceman a cūt o' the head wi' his raake. They'd been puttin' greät heäps o' chalk i' the laane ready to mend it, an' Jim cooms out o' the pūblic, an' sees theäse here greät white things afore him, an' reckons as he's happened on a tūt, an' sets to work to screäm an' holler fit to raise the dead, an' taakes the bobby for the ode gentleman hisself. Poor Mrs. Tear, it's bad for her, I reckon. Now, then, are yer goin' to reäd a pieße?"

She sat down opposite Bell, wiping her hands on her apron. He turned slowly to her.

"Do yer iver reckon," he asked, "as if it hadn't been for Mäister Champion I might ha' been i' the saam boät wi' Jim Tear? It's jūst along o' him that I'm here, an' he's a disgraaced maan. I scarce like to ask wheer he is, an' I doän't beleäve any o' 'em could tell me if I did."

Then, without waiting for an answer, he bent over the book and began to read, pointing with one finger. He had found the story of the Crucifixion.

fixion, the 15th chapter of St. Mark, and slowly and with many stumbles he read it through. When he came to the verse, "Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others, himself he cannot save." He paused to think, murmuring to himself, "Mebbe they were i' the right o' it, mebbe it was ower trew," and so continued to the end. Then he rose abruptly and went out, calling back over his shoulder that he was going to the home close. Mrs. Bell knew that there was a beast there with a bad foot, and guessed that this was what took him there. But she was mistaken; his real purpose was to try and find Beatrice. She, too, had loved the poor black sheep, and Bell was possessed of a great desire to hear news of him, or at any rate to speak of him to a sympathetic listener and so ease his mind.

During all the months that had passed since the trouble came, he had never spoken more than a mere greeting to Beatrice, and yet he had

watched her closely and knew as well as possible where she would be most likely to be at each hour of the day. He had seen Mr. Foster go by to church without her ; he knew that the day would bring back memories to her which would make her crave for solitude. At the bottom of the home close was a little copse, which at this time of year was always carpeted with primroses—among them he might find Beatrice. He was not disappointed ; as he crossed the field he saw her move among the trees and disappear, but he was hardly prepared for what followed. As he approached hoping to attract her attention, he saw that she had thrown herself down among the flowers and was crying quietly. Here where she believed herself free from interruption she had given way to bitter memories, letting them come unchecked until they overwhelmed her. This once, and this once only, was any one to penetrate below the surface of Beatrice's reserve, or know how much or how little the girl felt beneath her habitual

cheerfulness. There were many who guessed and wondered, others who tortured her with leading questions, some few who showed the true sympathy of silence, fewer still who learned how great had been the sorrow from the girl's deepened tenderness, but there was only one of her fellow-beings who ever spoke with her about it.

A slight noise roused her and she looked up to see Bell leaning over the stile, his eyes fixed on her with the same look of pity in them she had seen once before.

"Doän't taake on, miss," he began gently. "It äin't for the loikes o' me to talk to yer, büt I reckon as you and me were the on'y ones as knew the best o' Mäister Champion. He wer a good maan, that he were, spite o' the drink."

She had given a start of surprise when she first saw him and hastily dried her eyes, but as he spoke she rose to her feet and came near him. For the first time in all those months she felt that she was listening to one

who would not judge hardly, and she felt too that between them there would be none of that false shame, which made her misery so much greater if Harold's name were mentioned by one of her own class.

Bell continued simply.

"O' course Hannah an' me knew as yer were keepin' coompany, an' we often ewsed to reckon as he'd maake yer a good mattler, sūch a nice quiet maan as he seämed, būt yer see, miss, it were not to be, an' maayblins it's all for the best. When the drink's got hode on a maan, I reckon he's best single. Būt oh, it's sūch a pity, sūch a pity, an' he so kind an' all."

The thorn hedge was bursting with young life, and Beatrice broke off a twig and stood there pulling it to pieces, her lips quivering, her head bent.

Bell's eyes rested on her filled with longing.

"Būt your ower young, missy, to let this trouble best yer, ower young an' ower braave an' all. Many's the time I've seen yer smilin' an' talkin' so

pretty to the Mäister, an' I've thought to mysen, 'eh, but 'er heart's real heavy,' būt yer right, yer äin't goin' to let on about the pāin an' it 'ull not last, doän't yer be scar'd, it 'ull not last alwaays. An' yoor ode father, he's so proud an' pleased when you're wi' him, he thinks a deal on yer I reckon, you see you're all he has to look to i' his ode aage. Law, Miss Beetrice, yer mūstn't mind me talkin' to yer, I can mind the Sūndaay as you was christened, I can. I had yer i' me arms once when yer was a baaby."

"Did you?" she asked to encourage him to go on, for while he talked she could bear to think of her hidden sorrow, so naturally he spoke of her grief.

"Yis, that I did. I'll tell yer how 'twas. Your moother had ta'en a nurse-girl oūt o' Haxby as I was sweät on as a young feller, an' on Sūndaays I ewst to watch for her coomin' out, an' law, you was sūch a pretty baaby, I got clear silly aboūt you an' all, an' one daay I got her to let me carry

yer. Law, I was pleäsed. Then she left your Ma, and married one o' the grooms at Squire Thornton's, an' I was fit to goä craazed, I was. D'yer mind last harvest, Miss? Well, yer'd hear talk o' Mäister Champion's fetchin' me out o' the pūblic. It was trew, which is mower nor folks talk is as a rule, būt I should ha' gone back that night as sewer as sewer, if it hadn't been for what he tode me. Miss Beatrice, I knew from that night as he were a lost maan. I sat wi' him in the parlour till nigh marnin', an' he tode me all his life—how it had crep' upon him till now he reckoned it was ower laate to mend."

And then in his own language, Bell gave her the history of Harold's life, which had sunk with all its details deep into his memory. And Beatrice listened, hearing more than she had ever done before, the answers to all the sad questions that had been tormenting her. Lastly, Bell spoke of the man's grief and shame, and Beatrice leaned on the stile, hiding her face from him. Then for a time both

were silent. Two thrushes were answering one another in the trees overhead, and in the strong sunshine the faint scent of the primroses came to them from all around. Bell's dreamy eyes were fixed on the line of yellow sandbanks in the distance when he spoke again.

"What beäts me is what's bein' done to help him, does any one see a'ter him?"

"I believe Mr. Nugent did all he could. Of course he cannot get another curacy, at any rate for a long, long time, but he is working with the Church Army in the London slums."

Bell shook his head, he had no faith in London or the Church Army.

"An' yet," he said, "I reckon as that maan has mebbe done as mūch good i' Cowsthorpe as Mäister Nugent wi' all his ūpright livin'. I reckon I oughter thaank Mäister Champion, an' I do thaank him, an' theer's ootheras as has cause to do the saam. Mäister Nugent thinks a deäl about the bad example an' the scandal, būt it's them

as knows all about it as can help ootherers."

"Do you think he will ever get over it himself?" Beatrice said hardly above her breath.

Bell turned his eyes slowly on the girl's face, and watched the rosy color steal over it. Then he answered—

"Noä, I doubt not. I reckon he äin't gotten the strength."

She sighed and mūrmūred "What a wasted life."

"I dunno as yer ought to saay that, leästwaays not altogether. Things is maazin' strange i' this life, as yer maay saay. I was readin' i' the Book this marnin', an' we know what's written theer is good. Leästways I shall alwaays saay o' Mäister Champion an' all, "He saaved ootherers, himself he cannot saave."

THE END.

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